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**Position paper on the debate regarding Syrian refugees and the right to citizenship.**  
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**Turkish Citizenship should be granted to Syrian Refugees and all other Foreigners.**

**All asylum seekers in Turkey, including Syrians should be granted full refugee status and right to citizenship.**

Today, while the World is facing with the largest forced migration in its history, but the humanitarian aspect of migration and refugee crisis seems to be largely ignored. People, as soon as they cross borders into another country, become the subjects of the political and economic agenda within the host country. The fact that each and every refugee is unique with their own personal histories and stories is overseen while their class, ethnicity, religion, culture and nationality are objectified for ugly politics. A recent example of this is the Readmission Agreement between the EU and Turkey. Today, we see the same ugly politics in the 'Turkish citizenship' debate. The state does not grant refugee status to 3 million victims of war while planning to grant citizenship to 3 to 5 thousand Syrians.

Global actors like United Nations (UN) are feeding into this dirty negotiations with their terminology and practices. However today, concepts like refugee, migrant, economic migrant, or irregular/undocumented workers, exiles or asylum seekers, and a differentiation between forced migration and economic migration have lost its relevance. The only truth is that the World is violating international law and do not give protection for those who ran away from war, torture and oppression. For instance; those who are stateless; those who lost their houses, jobs, and does not have a future in their homelands; those who are marginalised under the economic, political and cultural

pressures enforced by neoliberal policies and have to leave their homes, are not considered under the refugee status by UN. On the other hand, 60 million people who have been displaced because of war, poverty, climate change, neoliberal policies, mass displacements, and cheap labor work transfers (slave trade) are defacto refugees who do not have a refugee status. While UN and EU does not take any action in order to provide a life in dignity for these people.

The simplest fact is that, millions of people flee their countries and lose their rights based national citizenship and that they struggle to survive in a foreign country where they are deprived from the basic rights and right to citizenship. In this regard, the response of people of the host nations should adopt an ethical approach to unconditional welcome and hospitality which goes beyond the conjectural needs of nation state or limitations of international hegemonical powers and institutions.

While defending absolute and unconditional hospitality, we express our desire to establish a relationship with migrants, refugees, oppressed and marginalised beyond and above the legalistic and institutional view of the world. By doing so, we open a path for struggle against all oppression and exploitation.

We say "welcome" to all migrants and refugees without ifs and buts. We welcome migrants and refugees unconditionally!

The 'right to rights' of these people who are stripped off from all basic rights is a right to exist without being pushed around or absorbed by dominant politics and powers. It is in fact a right to self determination and political existence. No government can be allowed to strip off the refugees from their political rights and take away their existence as their own political subjects.

We believe that being a political subject begins with having the right to self determination of one's own life. This can be achieved with internationally the right to full refugee status and access to citizenship in the host nations. Therefore we demand the granting of refugee status and the right to citizenship to all refugees and migrants in Turkey.

## **Foreigners**

For these reasons, we should remember the conditions in which foreigners live in Turkey and the fact that Syrians are not only ones who are deprived from citizenship rights. Foreigners in Turkey come from many countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan,

Iran, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Bangladesh, Georgia. These people, even before the Syrian refugees came, were exploited in labor market without any rights and protection. They are living with us in many years without having any visibility. Turkey has not granted refugee status for these people alike Syrians.

While capitalism and capitalist nation states produce the conditions which lead migration, on the other hand use migrants as cheap and 'flexible' labor for employers to make more profits. When the central capitalist states' cheap labour market have saturated, late capitalist states (like China, India, Turkey) have also opened their economies to cheap migrant labor. In parallel, Turkey has accommodated over hundreded thousands of migrant workers in the last 20 years. Just like central capitalist states, Turkey has intentionally allowed many irregular/ undocumented migrant workers and fed its growing economy with their cheap and flexible labour power. It is believed that almost one million foreigners work with underpaid, and without an insurance or union support in industries such as textile, mining, agriculture, tourism, housekeeping, elderly care, entertainment, sex industry and especially construction.

Especially the employers of small and medium size enterprises are happy with this new slaves of the capitalist world order. By not paying the minimum wage, such industries make an annual extra profit of 432 million Turkish Lira (€130 Million). The amount of unpaid social insurance and health protection premiums is estimated to be 1.6 Billion Turkish Lira (€480 Million). It is estimated that, over the last 15 years, small and medium companies made an extra profit of 12.2 million Turkish Lira (€3.7 Billion) by employing underpaid, undocumented and unprotected migrant workers.

Using these facts, we would like to remind those who see the Syrian workers as the cause of low wages, unemployment and poverty: Don't be confused. The cause of all of the above is the system of exploitation. Like the Turkish workers, Syrians are forced to work in this exploitative conditions. Turkish workers were exploited by the employers and their working conditions were terrible long before the Syrians had arrived.

Because of these reasons, our call for right to citizenship is not just for Syrians but for all migrants in Turkey. As part of the international framework of rights we demand the granting of full refugee status to all migrants and refugees and to banish the segregation between citizens and foreigners, we demand to right to citizenship to all migrants.

## **The Right to Citizenship and Discrimination**

We reject the conditions and criteria put forward for granting citizenship, such as skills, education and economic status. These are elements of class based discrimination. The most oppressed requires the most protection. We stand in solidarity with the poor, the women and the children. It is those children missing their vaccinations and other healthcare, the exploited Syrian child workers who work 10-12 hours a day for the last 5 years, the underpaid seasonal farm workers, the exploited 'Syrian brides' married to Turkish men as second wives, the sick and elderly, and Syrian LGBTI members who are driven to suicide that most deserve the right to citizenship.

Our call for citizenship right is not a glorification of the nation state or the borders that encircle it. On the contrary, we call for no borders for people fleeing wars and economic conditions. We also stand with the continued hope of refugees to return their own land. We stand in solidarity with their claim and their fight for their freedom and existence on their own land. We define the nation as a collective of people willing to live together in an enriched society of diversity rather than enforced singularity. Our call for citizenship is not about glorifying the nationalism here but about a different world that we want for all.

We call on the refugees: If you want to become an equal part of this nation we stand in support with your demands and your right to live here,

At this point we call on all asylum seekers, refugees and migrants on this land: We defended your right for free, safe passage to this country. In accordance with your wishes, we also demand the right for citizenship. We don't see citizenship as a social integration that swallows and eliminates you and your identity, or uses you for economic exploitation or categorizes you on the basis of your background, nationality, religion or ethnicity in the name of social engineering project. We see you as our partners in the struggle for a new society of democracy, freedom and equality.

With the hope of knowing and understanding them all, we say "welcome" to all foreigners.

We were all foreigners at some stage, and in future we could be foreigners in another country. That we were born on this land does not make us the owners. All land is for all people. Hence, real hospitality is about internationalism. The fight for internationalism will transform and change us all.

Utopian positions are also forces that change the reality. In fact we require this utopia as much as you do, to be and stay human. We need this for a democratic world and democratic nation state.

By rejecting the definition of citizenship as being part of national identity we also reject the ethnic and religious totalitarianism of nation states. Instead we see nations as a political form that intends to live together in a diverse society and that welcomes the newcomers. "Civilization" began with settlement. By taking away someone's right to settle down you take away their humanity. A nation is a collective of people settled together. Newcomers are not a danger or threat to the nation but an enrichment.

## Turkey's History of Migration and Citizenship

Migration is nothing new for this land. Looking at past 200 years, migration shaped the politics of the land.

Considering the history of the Turkish Republic, its response to migrants has been shaped according to political needs rather than humanitarianism.

Migrants in Turkey:

- 1922-1938 From Greece 348000, 1923-1945 From Balkans 800000, 1933-1945 From Germany 800,
- 1988 From Halabja (Iraq) massacre 51542,
- 1989 From Bulgaria 345000,
- 1991 From First Gulf War Iraq 467489, 1992-1998 From Bosnia 20000,
- 1999 From Kosovo 17746,
- 2001 From Macedonia 10500
- 2011-2015 From Syria 3000000

Since the foundation of the Republic, the state aimed for establishment of a national population policy. In 1923 the population exchange agreement with Greece and the Lausanne Agreement brought 500 thousand Turks from Greece and 200 thousand from Bulgaria to Turkey. Unlike the migration from Iraq and Bulgaria in 1988 these population exchanges were all about creating a Turkish national identity. Christians were sent away and Muslims were settled in.

Before the Syrians, the biggest migration was from Iraq (Kurds) in 1988 and Bulgaria in 1989. Harsh assimilation policies in Bulgaria led to Turkey accepting Muslim migrants. In those days, the Bulgarian migrant were immediately granted citizenship. It was a political calculation. Families were given state owned land for building homes. Despite these almost half of the 360 thousand returned to Bulgaria when things had changed for better in that country. The Iraqi Kurds, on the other hand were considered differently. They were placed in camps near the border. Their conditions were generally very poor. Over the years, almost all of them, in smaller groups returned to Iraq. The difference in attitudes towards migrants from Bulgaria and Iraq was that the Bulgarian migrants were Turks and the Iraqis were Kurds. Bulgarian migrants were seen as victims of Jivkov while the Iraqis did not get the same hospitality as victims of Saddam. Turkey, having not solved its own Kurdish problem was suspicious of Iraqi refugee Kurds. In 2000's a new wave of Bulgarian migrants arrived but this time the state did not give them citizenship.

They became part of the temporary migrant workers in the country.

In conclusion, the state's response has always been shaped by its own political and economic needs.

## **Empathy**

Remember the "Gastarbeiter" Turks in Germany. Maybe if we remember what these millions of migrant workers went through in Germany we can have more empathy with the Syrian refugees. What is more, Turkish workers were not fleeing war and bombs, they were invited to work in Germany.

Between 1950-73 Germany invited migrant workers from poorer countries. Hundreds of thousands workers from Turkey went to Germany. All legal framework to deal with migrant workers in Germany were setup to have temporary workers. Right to residency was subject to work. Germany was planning to send them back as soon as they fulfilled their jobs. They were not called 'migrants' but 'guests workers'. But things did not go as the German state planned. Migrants settled in the country, new generations were born, they had establish shops and their own businesses, they became part of the German life. Authorities said, "we wanted a workers but got humanbeings!". In Turkey, the German experience of migrant workers was called 'Germany, the bitter land'

This wasn't a uniquely German situation. European states have been enacting laws since 1990's to prevent migrant workers from settling and being part of the society. These attempts to look after the interests of the nations businesses but not caring for migrants and their social needs have all failed.

Let's not forget one thing: The Syrians who came to Turkey had no other choice. They escaped to the nearest country to save their lives. They are now in Turkey for 5 years and their chance to return home is quite limited.

What the Turkish migrant workers experienced in Germany, such as, racism, hate of foreigners, physical attacks etc., today the Syrians are experiencing in Turkey. The plan to select only a few 'useful', 'skillful' Syrians and grant citizenship means the rest of majority will be discarded as 'useless', 'beggars', 'criminals', 'dirty', 'prostitutes' etc. and will be abandoned to racist attacks.

## **Be Aware of the Fault Lines**

Do the people of Turkey struggling against unemployment and poverty; does the state finding it difficult to establish its national peace think that granting citizenship to 3000-5000 'qualified' Syrians will solve the problem?

How about the rest of the 3 million, the majority of whom at working age? The unemployment in Turkey was around 10% (3-3.5 million). In 2014 it rose to 11%. Youth unemployment is around 20%. This is also rising. Irrelevant of Syrians getting citizenship or not, given that they are here to stay, what we must discuss is how we solve this humanitarian crisis. Instead of blaming the employers exploring Syrians and the state letting this happen, pointing the finger at refugees will not solve anything. We can't forget that Turkey did not play a peaceful role in Syria. Instead it intervened with a Neo-ottoman imperialist appetite. It did ignore the internally sensitive issues and regional dynamics. We also have a responsibility for what happened in Syria. False agenda and debates on refugees instead of discussing these issues and moving towards a better solution are only a waste of time.

Such false attitudes highlight and deepen further fear in society. Are the Syrians to be used as government voters? Are they part of government plans for social manipulation? Are they to be used for changing ethnic dynamics of certain regions? All these questions and fears escalate ethnic and political tensions. There are already enough fault lines in the country based on ethnicity, religion, secularity etc. Another fault line on refugees will be devastation for all of us.

You can't eliminate mistakes by more mistakes.

### **Our first statement shall also be our last:**

All migrants, refugees, foreigners including Syrians should be given full refugee status.

All willing migrants, irrelevant of their class, ethnicity, religion, without any discrimination should be given right to citizenship.

Turkey should not turn into a refugee prison to please the EU. All refugees willing to go to other countries should be allowed to do so.

Syrians should not be systematically discouraged from hoping to return to their

homeland in future.

**The future of millions of people in the region, including people in Syria and Turkey, depends on Turkey's politics and policies to be humanitarian, realist, pluralist and democratic.**