**Hunger strike at the Deportation Center Kærshovedgård: “Close the camp! We are also humans!”**

*Press release on behalf of the hunger strikers, from the Network for Contact Persons for Rejected Asylum Seekers at Kærshovedgård, Trampoline House, Welcome To Denmark, The Bridge Radio, Stay Human-Aalborg, Solidarity Project Aarhus, Black Lives Matter Denmark and Freedom of Movements*

“Close the camp! We are humans, just like you!“ is the message from 28 hunger striking refugees, who have been protesting since October 11th outside the controversial Deportation Centre Kærshovedgård. The strikers are all rejected asylum seekers who cannot be deported because of various reasons. They are forced to live in a limbo-state in the former open prison that has operated as a deportation center since 2016.

“We are slowly dying,” says one of the protesting asylum seekers’ banners in Danish – a sign that the Danish government’s intention to make conditions in the center as unbearable as possible isn’t just rhetoric. Recently, Edward Stanley reported to the Danish newspaper Politiken how he regularly bears witness to suicide attempts. ([http://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/art6105458/Vi-udsættes-for-mental-krigsførelse-og-mister-forstanden](http://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/art6105458/Vi-uds%C3%A6ttes-for-mental-krigsf%C3%B8relse-og-mister-forstanden)).

The strikers are demanding Kærshovedgaard to be closed – and for their cases to be reopened. Demands that are in line with recommendations of a broad range of organisations – amongst them The Danish Helsinki Komitee for Human Rights and Amnesty International. Several experts on European migration politics are also raising criticism of the camp. Amongst others, the sociologist Annika Lindbjerg explains how there’s no evidence that ‘unbearable conditions’ in deportation centers will persuade people to leave Denmark. To the contrary, research from Norway shows that only very few people leave voluntarily, and that the human and economical expenses of camps like Kærshovedgaard are unproportionable high.

The hunger strike is a political tool that has been used in many different contexts and with different political ends throughout history. Historian Johan Heinsen points to examples in Danish history where hunger strikes have been used as a political tool in Danish slave ships and in protest against conditions for Danish prisoners as early as 1720. With their fight for humane and dignified conditions for refugees in Denmark, the hunger striking refugees thus place themselves in a Danish and international tradition of protest.

“We’re striking because we don’t know how long we’ll have to stay here. When someone is given a sentence for a crime, they know when they will get out, but we don’t know for how long we’ll have to stay here, and we haven’t even done anything criminal”
- Hunger striker at Kærshovedgaard”

**Spokespersons for the hunger strikers:**

Kamran: 2759 8933.

Shahoo: 7154 5457.

Hoshang: 9142 4203.

**Experts:**

**Martik Bak Jørgensen and Susi Meret**

**CoMID, Aalborg University**

”The hunger strike is the last and only possible expression of autonomy and self-determination when all other legal and civil rights are exhausted. It IS a political act in which one uses their own body as the only remaining tool to make society aware of the absence of other options. The hunger strikers in Kærshovedgaard are not criminals, but people whose demand for asylum has been rejected. But they’re subjected to conditions that are far worse than for those who’ve been convicted for crimes. They are an image of a European tendency where rejected asylum seekers are being criminalized, revoked of all their rights, and subjected to living conditions that are unbearable. That’s why people in Kærshovedgaard are hunger striking.

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**Annika Lindberg**

**PhD at Institute of Sociology, University of Bern – expert in rejected asylum seekers in Scandinavia**

“The deportation centers make it possible for the government to avoid human rights regulations instead of addressing the issue that certain rejected asylum seekers cannot return to their home countries. Some can’t return for practical reasons, because their countries won’t accept them, others because they don’t want to collaborate on their deportation because they fear for their lives, despite the fact that this is not considered ‘sufficient’ according to the Danish Immigration Service. Instead, these individuals are ‘parked’ in Kærshovedgaard, and thus sentenced to a limbo situation where they technically speaking can remain forever. We have also heard the protestors say that they’d rather stay in Kærshovedgaard as long as the alternative is to return to a country where they fear for their lives

Experiences from Europe (e.g. Norway, where there has been a similar model to the Danish one) show that deportation centers or other institutions that serve to pressure individuals to leave do not live up to their political purposes, but rather lead to more and more people going underground and ending up in an extremely vulnerable situation where they are being exploited in the work market or risk involving themselves in criminality”

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**Martin Lemberg**

**Professor at Global Refugee Studies - Aalborg University Copenhagen**

”The hunger strike at Kærshovedgaard shows what a desperate situation these people have been placed in. It also shows a problem with the deportation centers – the attempt to make conditions so unbearable that the people, who are considered a problem by the authorities, will disappear by themselves. But considering that only very few do so, this new institution in the Danish asylum system ends up, predictably, forcing vulnerable people into a long limbo with absolutely minimal rights and very serious consequences both physically, psychologically and socially. In addition, the deportation centers constitute a fundamental moral problem for liberal democracies because the logic behind them are to use some people’s worsened life conditions as a means of sending deterring signals to others”

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**Article links:**

Helsinki Komitee – Kærshovedgaard is worse than a prison: http://politiken.dk/indland/art6013614/Kærshovedgård-er-værre-end-fængsel

Law professor Jens Elo Rytter in Politiken: [http://politiken.dk/indland/art5880946/Juraprofessor-sår-tvivl-om-nye-krav-til-tålt-ophold](http://politiken.dk/indland/art5880946/Juraprofessor-s%C3%A5r-tvivl-om-nye-krav-til-t%C3%A5lt-ophold)

Amnesty International’s annual report criticizing Kærshovedgaard: <https://amnesty.dk/nyhedsliste/2017/kritik-af-danmark-i-amnestys-aarsrapport>

Research on unbearable conditions in camps:
<https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article-abstract/30/2/1/1560000/Failed-Asylum-Seekers-Responses-to-Arrangements?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

 

