

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 1 June 2006

Danish press

Denmark goes against UN to return Iraqis

600 Iraqis live in very poor conditions in Danish refugee centres, not daring to return home. Still the Danish government tries to push them to go back to Iraq, in spite of warnings from UNHCR about the seriousness of the situation. The 600 Iraqis have been held against their will for six years in Danish asylum centres and most of them have had their asylum applications rejected.

(Arbejderen online, www.arbejderen.dk, 1 June 2006)

Norwegian press

UDI's instructions were unlawful, lawyers say

The hearing of the legal basis the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration's decision of giving residence permits to Iraqis began today. The starting point is the criticism which according to one of Norway's top lawyers, Alf Petter Høgberg, is based on faulty conclusions. "The authority has exercised its given freedom – still this has resulted in a reporting to the police. This is entirely unacceptable", Høgberg says, claiming that the instructions themselves were in breach with the law.

(Dagsavisen online, www.dagsavisen.no, 1 June 2006)

Finnish press

UN preparing to evacuate thousands of Serbs from Kosovo

The UN refugee agency UNHCR is getting prepared for evacuating 70.000 Serbs if Kosovo is declared independent from Serbia and subsequent violence should occur. The UNHCR spokesperson Vesna Petkovic confirmed the existence of the evacuation plan but noted that the intention was to prepare for the worst alternative. The negotiations led by President Martti Ahtisaari should lead to defining the position of Kosovo at international level already this year.

(Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, 1 June 2006)

Disappeared Chinese youngsters found in Finland

The four Chinese youngsters that disappeared from the refugee reception centre at Oulu have been found in Helsinki. One man of foreign origin has been captured in connection to the case. It seems obvious that the intention was to send the youngsters to Eastern Europe and that it has a connection to organized crime. The youngsters came to Finland in December with false passports.

(Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, 27 May 2006)

External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 2 - Friday 9 June 2006

Swedish press

More Swedes positive towards refugees

An opinion poll conducted by political scientist Marie Demker and her colleagues at Gothenburg University reveals that Swedes' attitudes towards refugees have softened slightly during the last year. At the same time one can find a regional pattern concerning the attitudes towards refugees. People from the Southern regions of Sweden have a more negative attitude towards receiving refugees. The survey also shows that some 48 per cent of the people partaking in the poll now feel it would be very good or quite good if Sweden took in fewer refugees. One needs, however, to go back five years in time in order to find a lower percentage. Marie Demker thinks this is to do with refugee policy. "Swedish refugee policy has become more restrictive in recent years and supporters of refugees have mobilized. I'm thinking, for example, of all those who took part in the call for an amnesty last Easter led by K G Hammar. I think that their efforts have got results," said Marie Demker.

(Dagens Nyheter p.9, Svenska Dagbladet p.9, 4 June 2006. Source: SPR translation)

Majority of Swedes support multiculturalism

The latest Integration barometer from the Swedish Integration Board (*Integrationsverket*), which is being presented today, reveals that an increasing number of Swedes support multiculturalism and nine out of ten believe that immigrants with permanent residence in Sweden should have the same rights as native Swedes. However, half of those surveyed felt that integration of immigrants is not functioning well. The survey was conducted between November 2005 and January 2006. Some 2,572 people living in Sweden between the ages of 16 and 78 responded to the survey. The survey showed that three out of ten were definitely willing to help younger people with an immigrant background to get established in Sweden. A fifth were also prepared to act as mentors to newly arrived immigrants to help them get onto the job market. Three quarters of those who responded either wholly or partly supported the statement, "immigrants can enter Swedish society whilst still retaining their traditions", and a clear Nine out of ten agreed that there is discrimination towards immigrants in Sweden and a majority are also in favor of the authorities being more active in combating this. One new aspect to the survey was how international events affect people's attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

(Dagens Nyheter p.6, 8 June 2006. SPR translation)

Social services criticized

The County Administrative Board in Stockholm criticizes the social services handling of the apathetic asylum-seeking children whose cases were highlighted in the media last autumn. At the end of 2005, it was revealed that the social services had not examined the nine cases concerning suspected mistreatment of the children that were reported by the Swedish Migration Board.

(Dagens Nyheter p.16, Svenska Dagbladet p.12, 8 June 2006)

Swedish Migration Board forced to change decision

After a telling off from the Supreme Administrative Court (*Regeringsrätten*), the Swedish Migration Board has announced a new decision in the case of the family from the former Yugoslavia that was to be deported. The board had previously rejected the family's application and said that the temporary asylum law had been followed to the letter in the investigation. The family's brief trip to Oslo after living in Sweden for three years was given as one reason for the decision. But the court called it a "flimsy justification" and ruled that their case should be re-examined. The board now says it stands by its decision that the family cannot be granted a residence permit under the temporary law and is instead granting them permanent residency under the new legislation. Lawyer Hans Bredberg says that the board is obstructing the court. "At the same time they are avoiding making a decision that would set a precedent for hundreds of others seeking asylum according to the temporary Aliens' Act," he comments. (Dagens Nyheter p.13, 9 June 2006. SPR translation)

Effect on children not taken into account

When parents are given notice about deportation because of committing a crime, one does not take into consideration how such a decision can effect their children, according to the National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brottsförebyggande Rådet*), Brå. In a majority of the deportation verdicts from 2005, an account describing the effect on the children is missing, even though the Aliens' Act since 2004 demands that the courts should take decisions based on the well-being of the child. (SVT online www.svt.se, 9 June 2006)

Chinese human traffickers sentenced

The Chinese couple who smuggled around 40 Chinese children via Sweden to countries in Europe got their sentence today. The woman got sentenced to two years and three months while the man got two years in prison. Among other things, the couple gave the children fake passports and paid for their flights to and from Sweden. (Sources: Dagens Nyheter online www.dn.se, Sydsvenska Dagbladet online www.sydsvenskan.se, 9 June 2006)

Norwegian press

I'd rather starve than go home

Ten Afghans in Haugesund will join their Oslo-based fellow country men's hunger strike. They would rather die of starvation than return to Afghanistan. The decision about deportation by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (*Utlendingsdirektoratet*), UDI, remains in force. Since the hunger strike in Oslo began a few weeks ago the police have made preparations for the strikers' deportation. Yesterday representatives for the strikers met with UDI and got more information about the government's decisions. "We base our decision on what UNHCR says about the circumstances for return", said UDI's acting director, Ida Børresen. (Sources: Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, NRK online www.nrk.no, 9 June 2006)

Number of refugees going down

There are about 8,4 million refugees in the world – the lowest figure since 1980. However, there are more people fleeing today than in the last three years, according to the yearly refugee statistics published by the United Nations. For the fourth time since

1997 over 20 million people are fleeing from their homes and most of them are internally displaced people who flee within their own countries' borders. The internally displaced people are usually fleeing because of the same reasons as refugees. Afghanistan alone stands for 23 per cent of the refugees in the world. However, a number of deportations of Afghans have resulted in a lower number of Afghan refugees than in the beginning of 2005. Of the world's 8,4 million refugees about 2,5 million come from African countries. (Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 9 June 2006)

Danish press

We want more refugees

The number of refugees and displaced people continues to rise throughout the world – but not in Denmark. By accepting fewer and fewer refugees and asylum-seekers, Denmark is neglecting its international responsibility, according to The Danish Refugee Council which has now launched a new campaign, '1,000 More', in an effort to persuade the government to live up to its responsibilities. Denmark currently accepts only 500 refugees for resettlement (quota refugees) per year.

(Jylland-Posten p.4, 7 June 2006. Source: NE translation)

Asylum children 'not ready' for school

Asylum centres in Denmark may currently be housing around 300 children of school age, but according to the head of Red Cross' asylum wing, Jørgen Chemnitz, no more than 50 of them are ready to attend Danish schools after the summer holidays. "The majority of our children just wouldn't be able to function in a normal Danish classroom, either socially or in terms of learning," said Mr Chemnitz, in response to demands from local councils for money to cover the extra costs for new teachers or native language teaching. The Red Cross currently receives DKK 45,000 per child from the Ministry of Integration so that they can either be taught at the asylum centre or be placed in a local public school.

(Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk, 7 June 2006)

UNHCR: More IDPs but less refugees

The number of people that had to leave their homes due to conflicts or persecution increased to almost 21 million people last year, but the number of people having to flee their country decreased, according to a new report from the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR.

(Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk, Berlingske Tidende online www.berlingske.dk, DR online www.dr.dk, 9 June 2006)

We work for free!

Face-to-face campaigners from non-governmental organizations lie in order to get people to sign up for donations. Private companies have specialized in recruiting members for voluntary organizations. TV2 has examined how the people from the organizations work in the streets and states that many of them claim they work for free even though they receive both a salary as well as bonus. In Oslo, the company Verveavdelningen A/S works for, among others, WWF and Unicef. The company does not work for free but charges 900 NOK for every donor they recruit.

(TV2 in Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 9 June 2006)

Finnish press

Immigration to Finland decreasing

According to the latest edition of the international migration outlook made public by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, on Thursday, immigration to Finland has fallen sharply. In 2004, the number of immigrants arriving in Finland fell by a quarter from the year before. The statistics exclude people who stay for short periods of time, such as exchange students and seasonal workers. In the period under review, immigration into OECD countries rose while the number of asylum-seekers arriving in OECD countries fell by more than a fifth, according to OECD. (STT online <http://virtual.finland.fi/stt/>, 8 June 2006)

Finland's ranking improves in US report on human trafficking

Finland was raised from tier two to tier one in an annual report published by the US State Department on human trafficking. In a previous report complaints of inadequate legislation were forwarded, and reports of a sex concentration camp in Finnish Lapland. This year's report states that Finland has "made progress" in the prevention of trade in human beings. There still are some problems. Finland is seen as a transit country for trafficking in women from Russia, China, and to some extent from Moldova, Thailand, and the Caucasus region. The report states further that Finland is a transit country for victims whose final destination is in other European countries, and possibly even in the United States. Finland is also seen as a destination in human trafficking linked with forced labour. Both men and women are taken from Russia, Estonia, Turkey, and Asia to be exploited mainly on construction sites, in restaurants, or as domestic servants. The report praises Finland for having drawn up a national anti-human trafficking programme last year. The report nevertheless recommends further measures, such as an official witness protection system, and training of prosecutors and judges in the implementation of the new legislation. Finnish border guards have been given additional training to prevent human trafficking.

(Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, 9 June 2006)

Living as refugees in their own country

An increasing number of people are forced to flee within their own country, according to a new report from the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR. On the contrary, the number of refugees who crossed their own country's borders is among the lowest in ten years. Last year about 668,000 people sought asylum in 149 different countries. (YLE online www.yle.fi, 9 June 2006)

Estonian press

Almost 250,000 residence permits

The number of valid residence permits in Estonia came to 243,796 at the beginning of 2006, according to the yearbook of the Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board. Out of the holders of the permits, 136,000 had undetermined citizenship, 7,067 were citizens of the European Union, the European Economic Area or Switzerland, while 100,729 were citizens of third countries. Residence permits issued to citizens of Russia numbered 93,027, permits issued to citizens of Ukraine numbered 4,443 and permits issued to citizens of Finland numbered 2,277. Latvian citizens held 1,574, citizens of Belarus held 1,480 and citizens of Lithuania held 1,266 valid residence permits. Nationals of other countries were represented in smaller numbers, such as citizens of China with 196

permits and citizens of India with 112 permits. The number of people with undetermined citizenship has declined substantially in recent years. Since 2002, when the number of such residents was 172,325, it has dropped by more than 36,000.
(BNS online www.bns.se, 7 June 2006)

External Relations Unit
UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Saturday 10 – Monday 12 June 2006

Swedish press

Delayed prosecution against refugee smugglers

An expected prosecution raised against refugee smugglers on Monday in Uppsala was delayed since the investigation has taken longer time than expected. A network of smugglers are primarily suspected of serious people smuggling, organization of people smuggling and forgery. According to Swedish police authorities, the people smuggling gang is suspected of helping thousands of people from the Middle East to come to Sweden and other European countries by providing them with false documents.

(Uppsala Nya Tidning www.unt.se 12 June 2006)

Every third 65+ against immigration

The results of a Demoskop study show that many Swedish retirees disapprove of immigration and believe that Muslims present a threat to Swedish culture. 33% of the interviewed who were over the age of 65 agreed with the statement that immigration from the Islamic countries threatens Swedish culture and traditions. Only 15% of 15-29-year-olds agrees with the statement. The study also shows that those with low income, lower level of education, and those who live in rural areas are the most critical of immigration.

(Svenska Dagbladet p.6 12 June 2006, SPR translation)

Liberal's election manifesto

In its election manifesto, the Liberal Party wants to force all immigrants seeking social-security payments to attend language courses if they have not passed SFI classes. Everybody who seeks social-security payments must participate in work that contributes to society, referred to as a "job guarantee." The party also wants to invest in the Swedish language and teach immigrant children more about Sweden.

(Svenska Dagbladet p.8, Dagens Nyheter p. 15, 10 June 2006, SPR translation)

Migration good for welfare

Last week Secretary-General Kofi Annan launched a report on international migration and development. The report will be the base for a meeting in September on the same topic. Kofi Annan discerns a strong connection between migration and the positive development of countries where migrants arrive as well as countries from where they depart.

(Göteborgs-Posten online, www.gp.se, 11 June 2006)

Global Refugee Trends

The number of people fleeing their home countries has declined to its lowest level in almost 30 years. But still the number of internally displaced persons has increased heavily, and the total amount of refugees in the world has increased, reports the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR. The number of people fleeing their countries decreased from 9.5 million in 2004 to 8.4 million in 2005. Five nationalities make for almost half the

internally displaced refugees according to UNHCR: Afghans, Colombians, Iraqis, Sudanese and Somalis.

(Major media coverage including Norrländska Socialdemokraten online www.nsd.se, 10 June 2006, Sveriges television Radio online www.svt.se, TV4 online www.tv4.se, Motala och Vadstena Tidning online www.motalatidning.se, Sveriges Radio www.sr.se, 9 June 2006)

Norwegian press

UNHCR asks Norway to stop planned expulsions

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has asked Norway to stop plans to return Afghan refugees to their homeland, and has asked for a meeting with the Norwegian Government. The UNHCR is of the opinion that it is very difficult to cope in the Afghan capital Kabul, for those who do not have relatives or another network in the city. The view of the UN body is therefore that it would be wrong to send the Afghan refugees now on hunger strike in Oslo, back to Afghanistan. The Norwegian authorities do not share the UNCHR's views, and have planned to return around 1800 Afghan refugees to Kabul. Around 100 Afghan refugees have been on hunger strike in Oslo for the past week, in protest against the plans to return them to their homeland. On Saturday, *Aftenposten* reported that only those will be returned who do not have protection needs and who are well connected to areas for which UNHCR in their recommendations have accepted returns to.

(Norway Post online www.norwaypost.no, *Aftenposten* online www.aftenposten.no 10 June 2006, extensive coverage in all major Norwegian media 9-12 June)

Global Refugee Trends

The Norwegian coverage of the UNHCR report put special emphasis on the situation for Afghans, Columbia and that the fact that whilst the number of refugees decreases, the number of internally displaced persons is on the increase.

(Major media coverage including Bergensavisen online www.ba.no, Kristeligt Dagblad online www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk Århus Stiftstiderne online <http://stift.dk>, 10 June 2006)

Danish press

Ellemann calls for probe into Danish immigrant debate

In a major interview in Danish daily *Berlingske Tidende*, former Liberal foreign minister and party leader Uffe Ellemann-Jensen launches a frontal attack on the general tone of the debate in Denmark on foreigners in general and immigrants in particular, calling for an independent inquiry into its root cause. According to Mr Ellemann-Jensen, Denmark has missed the boat on globalization and chosen instead to adopt a posture of self sufficiency compounded with an exaggerated opinion of itself and its own importance. Expressing alarm at the generally xenophobic and unsophisticated tone of the Danish debate on foreigners, he says the government cannot afford just to dismiss the prevalent racist mood of the Danish people. "The tone in the debate has become harder in the past decade, I would like to see a proper scientific investigation into this," Mr Ellemann-Jensen said.

(Berlingske Tiderne front page, 11 June 2006, News Ex-Press translation)

Finnish press

Number of refugees decreasing, number of IDPs increasing

The number of persons fleeing from home countries is at its lowest in three decades. Instead, the number of internally displaced persons has increased alarmingly, states the UN refugee agency UNHCR. According to the agency's report, the number of persons fleeing from their home countries decreased from 9,5 million to 8,4 million last year. This can be partly explained by the increased number of people living in refugee-like situations within their own countries. According to the High Commissioner Antonio Guterres, a durable solution has been found to the problems of many refugees, but internally displaced persons eg. in Darfur, Uganda and Congo are still in need of immediate help. (Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, Häämeen Sanomat, Turun Sanomat, 9 June 2006)

The number of asylum seekers decreased

The number of asylum seekers in Finland has dropped from 1535 persons seeking asylum till the end of May last year to 933 asylum seekers this year. Reasons for the decrease include the smaller number of refugees worldwide, EU's strict border policy and Finland's remote location. Consequently, the Ministry of Labour is considering closing down 2 to 4 refugee reception centers of the total of 15 centers in the country. (Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi and Aamulehti 10 June 2006)

Estonian press

Russian national applies for asylum in Estonia

A Russian national has submitted an application for asylum in Estonia, the daily SL Ohtuleht reported. According to BNS report, spokeswoman for the Citizenship and Migration Board Ita Rauna, said that the person was in Estonia while submitting the application, adding that she can't give a closer comment on the issue, as information concerning applicants for asylum is confidential. Russian nationals have asked for asylum in Estonia before. Last November and December KMA rejected two such applications. Two Africans, two Turks, three Iraqis and four Russians applied for asylum in Estonia last year.

(Baltic Times online www.baltictimes.com, 9 June 2006)

External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Tuesday 13 June 2006

Swedish press

Övertorneå municipality positive to receiving refugees

Some 30 refugees can get a safe haven in Övertorneå municipality. Övertorneå is one of nearly 124 municipalities in Sweden not to have an agreement with the Integration Board on receiving refugees. The government has decided that Sweden will accept about 30.000 refugees this year, a substantial increase. Therefore, more municipalities willing to sign agreements are needed and the Integration Board is right now making an information tour around Northern Sweden. "30 is quite a good number. Partly to help those who are in need of a place to live, partly because we have empty apartments here in the municipality", Arne Honkamaa, local politician for the Social Democrats, says. The issue is to be debated on 26 June.

(Norrländska Socialdemokraten www.nsd.se, 13 June 2006)

Ambassador to fight human trafficking

The Swedish Foreign Ministry is appointing a special ambassador to combat human trafficking. In a statement, Minister for Foreign affairs Jan Eliasson says that human trafficking in Sweden, in the Baltic Sea countries, or anywhere in the world is unacceptable. The ambassador will be based in Stockholm, and will work closely with international and multilateral organizations, as well as other countries. Sweden has previously appointed special ambassadors on terrorism, human rights, and humanitarian issues.

(Radio Sweden online www.sr.se, 13 June 2006)

Norwegian press

Hunger strikers sent to hospitals

A dozen of the about 100 refugees from Afghanistan who have been on a hunger strike in Oslo were sent to hospitals around the town on Monday. Thorvald Stoltenberg, now president of the Norwegian Red Cross, launched talks with the striking Afghan refugees on Sunday. Many of the strikers have refused food since May 26, to protest against Norwegian immigration authorities' intention to send them back to Afghanistan. The strikers have said they rather die in Norway than are sent back to the uncertainty and dangers of life in Afghanistan. The government is not part of the talks led by Stoltenberg, whose son is currently Norway's prime minister. He is talking with the strikers together with representatives from another NGO, Flyktninghjelpen. The directors of Oslo's emergency hospital, Legevakt, said around 45 of the striking Afghans have received medical assistance during the past 10 days.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 12 June 2006)

Expulsion stopped in last minute

Norwegian police's alien unit had planes ready to send out the hunger striking Afghans two days ago. The journey was stopped as the receiving procedure in Kabul was not

ready. Plans were to send the Afghans to Kabul with charter flights. The Afghans say they will ask the UN to send them to a safe country, if they do not get permit to stay in Norway.

(NRK online www.nrk.no, 13 June 2006)

Government acts “stumblingly” on hunger strikers

The government receives heavy criticism for having asked the Red Cross and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRK) to negotiate with the hunger striking Afghans. “The government hides behind other parties because they are unable to solve the problem themselves. The decision has been made, the government must act. The issue is not that the Afghans have not understood the message; it is that they do not agree. The government must show power of action”, Siv Jensen from the Progress Party (FrP) says to *Aftenposten*.

(Nettavisen online www.nettavisen.no, 13 June 2006)

Parliamentary regulators blast former UDI bosses

The Norwegian parliament's key regulatory committee issued a highly critical report Tuesday on management of the country's immigration agency UDI. There was broad political support for what is being called the most serious bureaucratic infractions in years. Dagfinn Høybråten, a former government minister himself, sharply criticizes the former management at Norway's immigration agency. The parliament's Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs (Kontroll- og konstitusjonskomiteen) reported that a review of an independent investigation into UDI, plus testimony presented at its own hearing, revealed practices worthy of strong criticism. UDI's management, led at the time by Trygve G Nordby, "clearly violated" its obligation to inform the ministry of its "liberal interpretation of the rules... in defiance of political signals." It wasn't immediately clear what if any disciplinary action might be taken against Nordby, who now heads the Norwegian Red Cross.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 13 June 2006)

Reactions to the Progressive Party's asylum issue

The Socialist Left party (SV) reacts to the proposal from the Progressive Party (FrP) that all employees in the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) who are to evaluate asylum applications must be Norwegian citizens. SV's parliamentary leader, Inge Ryan, says the proposal breaches existing rules (*EØS-reglene*) and that they show FrP's true intentions with immigration policy. FrP is the only party to support this suggestion. FrP also want UDI to reject asylum applications if they are in doubt about the basis for application, and that the position as UDI directory be transformed to a position that only Norwegians can have.

(NRK online www.nrk.no, 13 June 2006)

Easier for juvenile asylum seekers

The parties of the coalition government, as well as the Christian People's Party and the Liberal Left, have agreed to make it easier for juvenile asylum seekers to obtain residence permit for Norway. If the children have lived in Norway for a considerable length of time, and have strong ties to this country, they should be granted residence. They should also be granted residence on humanitarian grounds. In addition, juvenile asylum seekers should be given residence permit if returning them to their homeland is impossible. According to the new regulations, children who have lived in Norway for a long period may ask for a new consideration of their status.

(The Norway Post online www.norwaypost.no, 13 June 2006)

Danish press

It's become easier to be a Muslim

Contrary to public opinion, the Mohammed crisis has actually led to a greater understanding of Danish Muslims. According to leading imams Abdul Wahid Pedersen and Ahmed Abu-Laban, who both preach in the heavily immigrant Copenhagen district of Nørrebro, the general tone towards Muslims in this country has become better, respect has increased, and understanding has improved. "It's the same message I hear from many in my community – Danes have become more willing to listen and are far more careful when discussing Islam or Muslims," says Ahmed Abu-Laban. "In addition, many Muslims say that dealing with the local authorities has become easier and that generally they feel more welcome here." Imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen believes that the crisis has taught people to be far more cautious when discussing religion. "In Denmark there has always been a tradition that people are allowed to do and say whatever they want, but now it seems that they are more willing to listen to what others have to say." (Jyllands-Posten front page, 13 June 2006, News Ex-press translation)

A majority of Danes don't see Muslims beneficial for Denmark

A survey by Berlingske Tidende reveals that 57 per cent of the population believes that Muslims are not beneficial to Danish society, although 39 per cent say that they are. Erik Bonnerup, head of the government's integration think tank welcomed the results as 'positive.' 'I feared that the figures could have been far worse,' he said. (Berlingske Tidende front page, 13 May 2006, News Ex-press translation)

External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 14 June 2006

Swedish press

Amnesty International criticizes Sweden

Amnesty International has accused Sweden and six other European countries of complicity in the American kidnappings of terrorism suspects. Amnesty calls for European Union leaders to declare the transfers unacceptable and to raise the issue when they meet American President George Bush next week. Sweden is criticized for turning over two asylum-seeking Egyptians to CIA agents in 2001. Amnesty calls on the Swedish government to carry out a thorough investigation into the circumstances.

(Sveriges Radio online www.sr.se, 14 June 2006 *also covered* in Dagens Nyheter www.dn.se, Göteborgsposten www.gp.se, Svenska Dagbladet www.svd.se)

Norwegian press

The UN intervenes in Afghan refugees' case

UNHCR intervenes in the conflict between the hunger striking Afghans and the Norwegian authorities. President of The Red Cross confirmed that talks are taking place. UNHCR participated yesterday in dialogues between the different parties. President of the Red Cross in Norway, Thorvald Stoltenberg, said dialogues will continue. "That is what we and the representatives for the hunger strikers are prepared for", Stoltenberg said to NRK. The hunger striking Afghans and the Norwegian authorities will continue their dialogue today. The UN delegation did not want to give any comments before leaving the country. Yesterday's dialogue started when the hunger striking Afghans demanded UN participation. The interpretation of relevant regulations was reportedly part of the discussions.

(NRK online www.nrk.no 14 June 2006. *Major coverage including* Dagbladet www.dagbladet.no, Verdens Gang www.vg.no, Aftenposten www.aftenposten.no, Nettavisen www.nettavisen.no)

Danish press

New book blames Prime Minister for Mohammed crisis

A new book, 'The Caricatures Crisis' gives Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen (V) virtually the complete blame for Denmark's biggest foreign policy crisis since World War II. The two authors, Politiken editor Tøger Seidenfaden and former head of the Minority Party Rune Engelbreth Larsen claim that it wasn't just a coincidence that the crisis happened in Denmark where the immigration debate is, due to the Danish People's Party, more anti-Islam than the rest of the western world. However, the two authors have been accused of being less than impartial in their findings.

(Politiken front page plus inside, 14 June 2006 News Ex-Press translation)

Finnish press

Victims of human trafficking receive special aid

A working group at the Ministry of Labour suggests a new establishment in order to help victims of human trafficking in Finland. According to the proposal, the establishment will be coordinated by the refugee reception centers in Oulu and Joensuu. They will provide help to social- and healthcare services, help to find housing and crisis help.

(Yle online 14 June 2006 www.yle.fi)

External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Thursday 15 June 2006

Swedish press

Authorities back off – family of nine gets to stay

The Alzghoul family of nine gets to stay in Sweden. After the Government Court's criticism of the Migration Board's previous evaluation, they have now been given permit to stay. "We are very happy and celebrate with all our friends. The whole family really wants to thank everyone who has been supporting us", says Mahmoud Alzghoul, son of the family. Last time *City* reported about the family, they had just received their rejection. As they had been in Norway for one day, the Migration Board did not take into account the entire period that they had stayed in Sweden. On 10 May the Government Court criticized the Migration Board's reasoning. "The Migration Board does not care about the law. It's elegant but tasteless. Now I await the Migration Boards decision on the about 20 others in the same situation. If anyone gets a no I'll approach the Government Court again", says defense lawyer Hans Bredberg.
(Stockholm City p. 6, 15 June 2006)

Migration Board in for a busy summer

It will take the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket) the entire summer to review the remaining 9.193 cases according to the temporary asylum law that expired 31 March this year. Applications for 21.879 people have now been processed. Most of the applicants are parents and children. Some 11.493 have been granted permanent residence permits and 3.178 temporary residence permits. 6.015 have been ordered to be deported, and about 1.000 applications have not been able to be processed for various reasons. Most of those who have not yet had their applications processed are single people. The largest group that has been granted permanent residence permits to Sweden is the Iraqis, followed by Serbia-Montenegrians and Somalis.
(Dagens Nyheter p 13, SPR translation, 15 June 2006)

Hard to get asylum in Sweden – fake marriages on the increase

Asylum seekers make fake marriages in order to get residence permits to Sweden. And the wedding certificate trade has become a goldmine. According to TV news *Aktuellt* a fake marriage can cost towards 700.000 SEK (96.500 USD). "Before, you could get one for 100.000 SEK (14.000 USD) but price has gone up dramatically", one person says. Most often the deal is made via friends and family. Several actors want to profit on the desperate people's hunt for residence permits, and cheats them for money. Fredrik Martinsson, lawyer at the Migration Board, says to *Aktuellt* that the Migration Board does not know how widespread this is. "But at the same time, I want to say that the majority builds on serious relationships".
(Expressen online www.expressen.se, 14 June 2006)

Norwegian press

Afghans are getting too weak for forced returns

Skinnier and with empty eyes, the hunger striking Afghans lie in the tent aside the cathedral, waiting for something to happen. Tomorrow 16 June, three weeks have passed since the hunger strike began. Over 100 Afghans are hunger striking by the cathedral in Oslo. Another 20 Afghans are also hunger striking in Trondheim and Haugesund. Oslo's medical service has treated over 40 hunger strikers for fluid loss. Norwegian doctors are obliged to help people whose lives are in danger, but the patients' rights law gives humans right to refuse to end a hunger strike on ideological basis. For each day that passes, the health of the strikers get worse, and more and more of them will not be fit for forced returns by the police, should that become reality. (Dagsavisen online www.dagsavisen.no, 15 June 2006, via Magenta News)

Asylum seeker without papers got employment at Stortinget

An asylum seeker with unknown identity, who had his asylum application rejected, did in 2004 manage to pass the security controls and get an ID-card to the Norwegian parliament, *Stortinget*. The man had found a job in a cleaning company, TV 2 reports. With Stortinget's entry cards one can wander freely about the elected politicians. This was discovered in November last year, as the man was stopped in a routine control at the bus terminal in Oslo. The man was then in possession of ten narcotic pills, an American certificate and an entry card for Stortinget. He was portrayed both on the certificate and the door cards, but used two different names. As he went to the police to get his papers back, it surfaced that the man had come to Norway in 2003 without passport or other ID-papers.

(Verdens Gang online www.vg.no, 14 June 2006)

Borrow an immigrant

Next Monday the public can borrow immigrants for a chat at the Lillehammer library. In connection to the World Refugee Day on 20 June, seven different "books" are lending themselves out, reported *Gudbrandsdølen Dagningen*. The volunteers are respectively from Somalia, Afghanistan, Burma, Sudan, Kongo, Kosovo and Chechnya. "The concept to lend out people for chats is a method Norsk Folkehjelp has utilized for a long time." For example homosexuals, HIV-positive and disabled people have taken part in these kinds of chats. Together with the municipality of Lillehammer, the library and the Red Cross arranges the "people-library" to challenge prejudices and give the "reader" the opportunity to experience something new. On Friday this week the "people-library" will also be tried out at different schools in Lillehammer.

(Nettavisen online www.nettavisen.no, 14 June 2006, via Magenta News)

Danish press

The Danish Refugee Council collects signatures for the World Refugee Day

On the UN refugee day 20 June, the Danish Refugee Council is drawing the politicians' attention to the need for increasing the number of UN-refugees. The Danish Refugee Council wants to increase the annual number of UN-refugees from 500 to 1.500 and supporters are encouraged to sign a petition list. The signatures are to be handed over to UNHCR on 20 June.

(Arbejderen online www.arbejderen.dk, 14 June 2006, via Magenta News)

External Relations Unit
UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm
swest@unhcr.org
www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Friday 16 June 2006

Swedish press

The situation of migrants will be reviewed

Refugees are at the core of the migration debate in Sweden, despite the fact that they only make up ten percent of those coming to the country. The government now intends to review the situation of immigrants. "In a globalized world we must have simpler rules for those who seek employment. The rules for immigration of labour has not been updated", said Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy Barbro Holmberg. Only within the EU, close to ten million immigrants are today working without permits. Neither Sweden nor any other EU-countries have made it easier for them to receive legal access to the formal economy.

(Sveriges Television, www.svt.se, 15 June 2006)

Young mother deported despite death threats

The Swedish Migration Board has decided to deport a young Turkish woman and her little son to Turkey. The decision has been taken despite the fact that the woman's father has threatened to kill her if she returns to Turkey. The woman currently lives in protected housing due to threats from her brothers also residing in Sweden. For protection reasons, she has applied for a residence permit. However, both the Swedish Migration Board and Aliens Appeals Board have come to the conclusion that the young mother can get equally good protection in Turkey, and therefore will be sent back. The decision has been criticized by Amnesty in Sweden.

(Sveriges Radio, www.sr.se, 16 June 2006)

Norwegian press

Police action against asylum seekers on hunger strike

The Oslo police began on Friday morning to remove the 100 Afghan asylum seekers who have been on hunger strike in front of the Oslo Cathedral for the last three weeks. But most of them were soon again in front of the church. They have been protesting against the decision by the Norwegian authorities to turn down their application for asylum. They also protest against being returned to Kabul, where they say it is not safe for them to live. The hunger strikers were transported by bus to the Oslo medical emergency ward for examination. Latest reports say most of the Afghan asylum seekers were soon back in front of the Cathedral, after they had been transported to the emergency ward. But by now the police had removed their tents.

(The Norway Post online www.norwaypost.no, 16 June 2006, *extensive coverage in Norwegian media including NRK online www.nrk.no, Nettavisen online www.nettavisen.no, Verdens Gang online www.vg.no, Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, TV2 online www.tv2.no)*

Oslo growing with immigrants

Norway's capital Oslo is rapidly expanding, though only one in ten is an ethnic Norwegian. *Aftenposten's* survey shows that immigrants account for 92.5 percent of the capital's total population growth over the past ten years. Immigrants from Western nations make up seven percent and non-western immigrants nearly 86 percent. "The number is surprisingly high," admits the City of Oslo's special adviser Geir Thorsnæs. He reckons that mainly the rise is due to relocation. Thorsnæs believes that factors outside of Norway will decide the city's future. "Those who have come will stay. Refugee crisis and changes like the expansion of the EU will determine immigration," Thorsnæs said.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 15 June 2006)

Finnish press

Three reception centers to be closed down

The Ministry of Labour intends to close the refugee reception centers situated in Punkalaidun, Vaasa and Perniö. Furthermore, an additional department in the Tampere reception centre will be closed. The Ministry argues that there is no need for such a capacity as the number of asylum seekers has gone down 40 percent compared to last year. There are 15 refugee reception centers in Finland.

(Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi, 16 June 2006)

The number of IDPs increases

The number of internally displaced persons has risen alarmingly while the number of persons fleeing their home countries is at its lowest in 26 years, reports the UN refugee agency. Last year IDPs totaled 12.5 million while the overall number of persons fleeing came to 20.8 million. "The positive news is that more than six million refugees have returned home since 2002. The sad thing is that there is a long way to go before the refugee problems for example in Uganda, Congo and Darfur are solved", states the High Commissioner António Guterres.

(YLE online www.yle.fi, 14 June 2006)

External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Saturday 17- Monday 19 June 2006

Swedish press

Asylum-seekers receive their own health care center

In about two weeks the first health care center for asylum seekers will open in Malmö. Unlike today's health care for refugees, this center will offer more than "health talks". "The new thing about our center is that we can provide medical services. We will have a full-time doctor, a welfare officer and a psychologist at the child care", said Gunnar Dahlbäck, head of the refugee healthcare. The center also has a multi-lingual staff that will facilitate the communication with the patients. The new center will open on 3 July in Malmö.

(Sveriges radio online www.sr.se, 16 June 2006)

Norwegian press

Stoltenberg rejects demand to review hunger-strikers' cases

Several Sosialistisk Venstreparti (SV) politicians have criticized the government's handling of the Afghan hunger-strike drama that has been going on in Norway for three weeks. They're demanding "more humane" treatment of the Afghan refugees, who say they'd rather starve to death in Norway than be forced to return to Afghanistan. "I understand that people are upset by this situation, but a hunger strike can't be a reason for granting residence in Norway", said Stoltenberg. The Norwegian Red Cross worked over the weekend to improve sanitary conditions for the striking Afghans, who were forcibly removed by police from their encampment outside the Oslo Cathedral but later returned. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recommended guidelines that would allow the Afghans to remain in Norway, but Norway has opted to follow its own policies.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no 19 June 2006)

Danish press

Danish People's Party demands tougher travel sanctions against immigrants

Although Minister of Refugees, Immigration, and Integration Rikke Hvilshøj (V) has announced a number of far-reaching measures to stop immigrant parents from sending their children back to their native countries to be 're-schooled' during the Danish school year, the Danish People's Party (DF) is demanding even tougher sanctions. Ms Hvilshøj has proposed that parents, who send their children away should have their social benefits slashed and the authorities be given the power to forcibly remove immigrant children from their families if they are out of the country for a long period of time. However, according to DF's Peter Skaarup, tougher sanctions are needed. "Sending a child away for weeks, or even months, to the parents' native country sends a strong signal of where that family's allegiance lies", he said. "If a family chooses to abuse the system in this manner then it should lead to deportation". Ms Hvilshøj wants school officials to report any case where they believe a child has been sent out of the country for 're-schooling' to the local education authorities who can take action against the

parents. DF is demanding that if school leaders wilfully withhold information they should be fired immediately.

(Jyllands Posten www.jp.dk 19 June 2006, NEWS express translation)

Latvian press

Latvia grants refugee status to Belarus citizen

Latvia has granted refugee status to one Belarus citizen, reported the Latvian Citizenship and Migration Board (PMLP). Last year, 20 people applied for asylum in Latvia, including two Belarus citizens. This year, four people have asked for asylum, three Russian citizens and one Afghan national, but no refugee status has been assigned to any asylum seekers filing their application in 2006. Since 1998 when the asylum procedure was introduced in Latvia, as many as 158 people have sought asylum in Latvia. Of those, nine have been granted refugee status and nine others alternative status.

(Baltic News Service online www.bns.ee, 16 June 2006)

Estonian press

Estonian foreign minister to attend UN session of human rights council

Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet will be attending a session of the recently elected United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday and Tuesday. Among other issues, the council will discuss the program of its first year, lay the foundation for new working mechanisms of the council and above all work out a human rights review comprising all the countries, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry said. Paet will speak at the session and is scheduled to meet with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, High Commissioner for Refugees, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Federation and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

(Baltic News Service online www.bns.ee, 19 June 2006)

Finnish press

A walk of hope

The World Refugee Day will be celebrated tomorrow in both Vasa and Oravais, where there are reception centers. Marches and celebrations are to take place in both cities, despite the fact that the reception center in Vasa will be closed down in six months. Although the reception center in Oravais is not threatened by a close down, their budget will be trimmed. The UN World Refugee Day is celebrated in Finland for the third year in a row. Eleven refugee reception centers around the country arrange different events during the day. The walk of hope symbolizes the long distances, children in refugee camps in for instance northern Uganda walk every night in order to get to the closest city, sometimes fifteen kilometers away.

(Vasabladet online www.vasabladet.fi, 19 June 2006)

External Relations Unit

UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm

swest@unhcr.org

www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Tuesday 20 June 2006

Swedish press

Migration Board employee risks disciplinary warning

An employee at the Migration Board's transit unit in Malmö refused to take fingerprints and to photograph asylum seeking Iraqis. The male employee is now risking disciplinary action. According to him, it was a "matter of principle" not to deal with these particular asylum seeking Iraqis.

(Dagens Nyheter, 20 June 2006)

"Not enough research about refugees"

Swedish daily *Svenska Dagbladet's* cultural pages feature a book review by Eva Norström, ethnologist at Lund University. The revised book "Flyktingfällan" ("The Refugee Trap") is authored by Sanna Vestin and focuses on the complexity of the refugee issue. According to the review, there is a shortage of research on the refugee subject resulting in a lack of reliable knowledge on the issue. "Why is there not enough knowledge about the actual conditions that people who are fleeing live under?", she writes. It is pointed out that one of the shortcomings of the debate about refugees is that debaters take the liberty to simplify, generalize and interpret other's thoughts.

(Svenska Dagbladet Kultur p. 6, 20 June 2006)

Norwegian press

Rejected Afghan refugees may start eating again

The scores of Afghan refugees who have been on a hunger strike in Norway to protest their looming deportation were evaluating whether to end their strike on Tuesday and accept nourishment. Many of them are now in critical condition and members of Norway's left-center government have appealed to them to call off their strike. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg has refused to order a new review of their individual cases, claiming that hunger strikes can't be used to change immigration policies in Norway. Late Tuesday, however, two government ministers issued a bit of a reprieve. They said that deportation of those coming from outside Afghanistan's capital of Kabul would be postponed until after New Year. That prompted a spokesman for the hunger-striking refugees to tell Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) on Tuesday that the strikers would now evaluate whether to end the strike. Norwegian Red Cross workers, meanwhile, continued to monitor the strikers' health. Some have already been taken to local hospitals.

(Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 20 June 2006)

Afghan refugees may end hunger strike

The 100 Afghan asylum seekers who have been on a hunger strike outside the Oslo Cathedral for three weeks, say they are willing to consider ending the strike, after the Government has promised to postpone returning home those who are not from Kabul. On Monday, Finance Minister Kristin Halvorsen and Minister of Integration, Bjarne Haakon Hansen said that no one whose home region is outside the Afghan capital Kabul

will be returned home before next year at the earliest. The situation will now be discussed among the several groups of Afghan refugees in Norway who have had their application for asylum turned down. It is believed they number around 2000 in all. Finance Minister Halvorsen now hopes that the hunger striking asylum seekers will end their strike. She also said that the groups who are supporting those on hunger strike, among the SOS Rasisme, have a great responsibility for what will happen. (Norway Post online www.norwaypost.no, 20 June 2006)

The Norwegian Refugee Council: “End the hunger strike”

The Norwegian Refugee Council is strongly objecting the Afghans’ hunger strike and want them to stop. “The government has now reached out far, further than for any other refugee group in Norway. This should be a clear reason to stop the hunger strike”, says Thomas C. Archer, Secretary General of the Refugee Council. “In principal, hunger strike is not acceptable, and it is tragic that these people are putting themselves to such a big risk that a hunger strike implies”, Archer says. During yesterday’s press conference, the leader of the Socialist Left Party (Sosialistiske Venstre, SV) Kristin Halvorsen issued a heavy warning to those who sympathize with the hunger strikers, amongst others to SOS Rasisme. (Verdens gang online www.vg.no, 20 June 2006)

“Tricky to find Afghans living in shacks”

The police will have a dire job tracking the hundreds of Afghan asylum seekers who have had their applications rejected. Many of the asylum seekers are in unknown locations, living in hiding or in unregistered shacks. The Directorate of Immigration is in contact with only 133 of those who are to be sent back to Afghanistan. (Verdens gang online www.vg.no, 20 June 2006)

Directorate of Immigration’s age test unreliable

The Directorate of Immigration’s methods for deciding the age of minor asylum seekers by painting the hand’s skeleton does not measure up to standards. According to an expert medical team, the method is not reliable because of variations in bone formation depending on factors such as nutrition, genetic disposition and living conditions. (Aftenposten online www.aftenposten.no, 20 June 2006)

Danish press

Suicide attempts on the rise amongst asylum seekers

The number of asylum seekers in this country attempting suicide has risen dramatically. A 37-year-old Iranian man hung himself in his room at Hanstholm Asylum Centre, Monday, just days after being told he was to be deported. Newly-released Red Cross figures reveal that the number of suicide attempts this year is already more than the whole of 2005. “Attempted suicide is more often than not a signal of powerlessness, resignation and a cry for help, more than a real wish to die”, says the head of the Danish Red Cross Asylum Wing, Jørgen Chemnitz. (Urban p. 2 News Ex-press translation, 20 June 2006)

Latvian press

Latvia approves emigration allowance to two Russian military pensioners

Jurijs Budajevs and Vladimirs Smetanins and their spouses want to emigrate

from Latvia. The total allocated allowance is 3,600 lats (EUR 5,122). The Russian military pensioners who want to leave Latvia can apply for emigration allowance since 1 Jan. People who have permanent residence permit or who have refused the non-citizen status and have obtained citizenship of another country qualify for such an allowance. The militaries who have been demobilized by 1992 and are receiving a pension from Russia and those to whom the agreement on social protection of the Russian military pensioners and their families residing in Latvia apply, can be subjects to emigration allowances. An emigrant can receive 1,200 lats, and a disabled person can receive up to 8,000 lats. The specialists have calculated that about 70,000 lats will have to be paid in allowances. At present there are about 17,800 Russian military pensioners and their family members residing in Latvia.
(Baltic News Service, 20 June 2006)

External Relations Unit
UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm
swest@unhcr.org
www.unhcr.se

Baltic and Nordic Headlines

Wednesday 21 June 2006

Danish press

Iranian asylum seekers hunger striking

The suicide of an Iranian asylum seeker has led to protests. In Copenhagen, the castle square (Christiansborg Slotsplads) is the scene for a hunger strike. Handful Iranian asylum seekers have started hunger striking as a protest against the Danish refugee policy, and especially against the long time a many asylum seekers have to wait at reception centres. "It is pure torture", says one of the hunger strikers, Masoud Riisvan, who himself has had asylum in Denmark since 17 years, but joined the hunger strike to show solidarity to the rejected asylum seekers. Riisvan expects that more will join the hunger strike already by Tuesday evening. He does not know how long the hunger strike will last. "For now, we are just staying here", he says. According to Riisvan the police has given an oral approval for the action until 22.00 hrs. "But we are staying also after 10 pm. Then we will see what happens", Riisvan says.

(Berlingske Tiderne, Politiken, Jyllands-Posten online, www.berlingske.dk, www.politiken.dk, www.jp.dk, 20 and 21 June 2006)

Green card for skilled foreigners

In an effort to make it easier for highly qualified foreigners to work in Denmark, the government, backed by the Danish Peoples Party (DF), is to introduce a green card permit based on the Canadian system. Armed with a green card, foreign workers with special skills will be allowed to come to Denmark and reside for up to six months whilst looking for work – and to take their family along. To gain permanent residency the person will then be required to find a steady job in a sector where there is a lack of qualified manpower and earn a salary of at least DKK 450.000 per annum. Initial qualification for a green card will be based on a points system awarded for education, linguistic ability, job experience and age.

(Jyllands-Posten p.3 News-Express translation, 21 June 2006)

Continued efforts against "asylum shopping"

Only the government and the Danish Peoples' party agree on a deal for future immigration, which among other things imply that immigrants have to take an exam to get access to temporary residence permit and financial aid. Furthermore, immigrants that want family reunification shall be tested in knowledge about the Danish society and the effort against the so called asylum shopping will continue.

(Berlingske Tiderne online www.berlingske.dk, 21 June 2006)

How much to be paid for pictures of Brad and Angelina's baby?

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt donate the pictures of the new born baby to charity. The pictures went to the highest bidding. Weekly magazine People is said to have given almost 40 million DKK for the rights in USA, and printed seven large pictures of the highly ordinary baby together with mum and dad. Angelina Jolie is the UN's refugee ambassador for the fifth year and uses her media status wisely to put the spotlight on refugees and children. "Whilst we are celebrating our daughter's birthday, ten million children from the Third World die every year on their first day in life", Angelina Jolie says.

(Jyllands-Posten online www.jp.dk , 21 June 2006)

"No more" - Refugee day without hope

The Danish Refugee Council has during the latest weeks been on streets and squares to raise signatures, encouraging refugee and integration minister Rikke Hvilshøj to increase the number of resettled refugees. "1.000 more" is the name of the campaign. It recommends that Denmark on top of the 500 so called quota refugees, should take on another 1.000 as less and less are seeking asylum in Denmark. Since 2001 the tally has fallen from 12.000 to 2.260, whereof 1.100 got asylum. The Danish Refugee Council's name petition stopped on 20 June, but was - of course - ended by the government already before it started. To further Denmark's particular stand the Danish law on resettlement was just changed so that the 500 refugees that we take on annually must have "integration potential". Instead of 1.000 more the Refugee Aid's initiative comes to an end with a depressing message from the government and the biggest opposition party. And that being on the World Refugee day, for which this year's theme is "hope" (Politiken online www.politiken.dk, 20 June 2006)

Danish Refugee Council shaken by agreement

Life for the refugees that are the worst off will now get even worse. "Remove the new demands", says the Refugee Council. General Secretary Andreas Kamm is shocked by the agreement between the Danish People's Party and the governing Left and Conservatives. "I am honestly shaken over that each time anything bigger is to be done, it is something that worsens the refugees' conditions", Kamm says. The new demands mean that refugees shall pass an integration exam and have half a year's work to get a permanent permit to stay in Denmark. That is a hard demand for a victim of torture, and the agreement has also got a possibility for individual dispense. Handicapped persons and those on early retirement and other pensioners are excluded from the demand. The conservative integration chairman Henriette Kjær denies that cut-backs are on the expense on the weakest.

(Politiken online www.politiken.dk, 20 June 2006)

Estonian press

Foreign minister: Indigenous peoples issue should be dealt with

Speaking at the opening session of the recently established Human Rights Council of the United Nations, Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet said that Estonia finds the situation of indigenous peoples of the world and the fight against trafficking of human beings important for the activity of the council. Tuesday evening Paet met with UNHCR representative.

(BNS online www.bns.ee, 20 June 2006)

Finnish press

World refugee celebrated around the country

UN World Refugee Day is celebrated on Tuesday. In Finland focus is given to the difficult situation of the asylum-seeking children who have come without parents. Finnish NGOs handed their statement on Finland's targets for refugee policy during its EU presidency to Tarja Filatov, the Minister of Labour.

(Yle online www.yle.fi)

Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) reported widely on WRD in radio broadcasts during the day of 20 June 2006. Reports included a direct broadcast from the event in Tampere interviewing representatives from UNHCR and a refugee reception centre.

NGOs: Finland should tackle refugee politics on its EU presidency

In a joint statement, eight organizations demand that Finland should bring up EU's asylum and refugee politics and assess it critically during its EU presidency. Finland should enhance interference to the reasons for becoming a refugee both through development aid and crisis management. Finland should also be critical towards the list of safe countries of origin. NGOs state that Europe should take more responsibility for world's refugees. Statement was handed to Tarja Filatov, Minister of Interior today. UN World Refugee Day is celebrated in 11 refugee reception centers around the country. (Helsingin Sanomat online 20 June 2006)

EU should support the return of refugees

Open editorial by Antonio Guterres
(Helsingin Sanomat, 20 June 2006)

More and less refugees

The number of persons fled from their country of origin is smaller than in years. Today, on the UNHCR world refugee day is a good occasion to celebrate it. However, an increasing amount has fled from homes but stayed within their country of origin. Many refugees stay close to their home countries, which are often as poor as their home countries. The position of UNHCR was questioned after the resignation of its director last spring. The new director Antonio Guterres has come to publicity with important insights: "We all share the responsibility of ensuring international protection to those who need it." (Leader in Turun Sanomat, 20 June 2006)

World refugee day celebrated with hope theme

"I hope someone will find me. I hope they won't kill me. I hope we learn to fit in. I hope we never ever have to run again." UNHCR's text read aloud in Turku refugee reception centre reminds us why refugees are here. Martha, a 24-year-old journalist from Ethiopia says she came in order to save her life. "I lost my job and dignity, but am grateful for managing to save my life." She has been in Finland for nine months and has no permanent residence permit. On world refugee day, special attention is given to the so called B-status, which allows staying in reception centre for two years but does not entitle to social security or work permit. This year's UN refugee day has a hope theme. In Finland the day is celebrated in 11 reception centres, among others in Perniö which is among those to be closed down. (Turun Sanomat 21 June 2006)

Refugee day was celebrated on foot

At 10 am a crowd of people gathered at the refugee reception centre to take part in a "Hope promenade" to celebrate the UN World refugee day. "The idea is to try with own feet how it feels to be a refugee", explained the UNHCR representative Mira Banerjee. Each participant got a registration wristband and a protein biscuit, which is used as emergency food at refugee camps. This year's theme for WRD is hope. The head of refugee reception centre, Heli Jussila, brought up the difficult situation of persons who have received a so called B-status. (Tamperelainen 21 June 2006)

Finland sends back first Congolese asylum-seekers

Congolese asylum-seeker Goloze Wuluwulu heard last week that The Finnish Directorate of Immigration rejected his asylum application. Wuluwulu, who has lived for nearly three years in Finland, says that he fled government oppression and tribal problems. Nobody has been deported from Finland to the Democratic Republic of Congo in recent years until earlier this month, when a Congolese family with four children was sent back after spending four years in Finland. Päivi Keskitalo, a lawyer for the Refugee Advice Centre, has said that the gap in repatriations could be linked with a decision last summer by the European Court of Human Rights, according to which Finland could not send back a Congolese asylum-seeker. She now fears that more repatriation may follow. (Helsingin Sanomat online www.hs.fi 20 June 2006)

Norwegian press

Afghan asylum seekers end hunger strike

The around 80 Afghan asylum seekers, who have been on a hunger strike in Oslo for 26 days, ended their strike late Tuesday evening. A spokesman for the strikers, Zahir Athari, says a statement by the Norwegian government on Tuesday was decisive. The Government stated that all Afghan asylum seekers who have been seeking asylum in Norway will receive legal assistance to have their applications reassessed. In addition, the Government promised to follow the recommendations from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on returning refugees to Afghanistan, and that no one will be returned to Kabul, unless the UNHCR believes it is safe. Minister of Labor and Social Inclusion Bjarne Håkon Hanssen told NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting) that the Afghans had not achieved asylum by striking.

(The Norway Post online www.norwaypost.no and Aftenposten www.aftenposten.no, 21 June 2006)

The day after the ending of the hunger strikes

There exists a feeling of uncertainty and confusion in Afghan refugee camps since the hunger strike ended yesterday. "It is not easy, we feel insecure", said Anousheh Horiat, 32, to NTB. She has been the contact person between the Afghans and the authorities for the past three week long hunger strike action. 40-50 persons were on Wednesday still at the camps outside the Cathedral in Oslo, in tents that the Norwegian Red Cross has set up. The tents will not be removed until on Thursday morning, since the Red Cross wants to make sure all individuals have a place to stay.

(Aftenposten www.aftenposten.no, 21 June 2006)

Oslo ban niqab

The City of Oslo has received clearance from the Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education to forbid veils that cover all of the face but the eyes. Teachers feel that the niqab is a hindrance to communication. Fakhara Salimi, head of the MiRA Resource Center for immigrant and refugee women, did not welcome the news. "Banning something that impinges on an individual's freedom is never good. Adult women over 16 should be able to choose for themselves," Salimi said. She felt that seeing the eyes was sufficient for daily school communication. "We are not forbidding religious garments. One must distinguish between the religious hijab and the completely covering niqab," said Torger Ødegaard, city councilor for schools and education. Norway becomes the third European country, after Sweden and France, to forbid the use of the niqab in schools.

(Aftenposten www.aftenposten.no. Also covered in The Norway Post online www.norwaypost.no, NRK online www.nrk.no, 21 June 2006)

Icelandic press

UNHCR interviewed in Morgenbladet

A report on the Worlds Refugee Day was published interviewing the UNHCR representative Kristina Rodriguez on 20 June 2006.

Swedish press

Green Party's Fridolin attack the refugee politics

"We are always criticizing the country on the other side of the bridge, Denmark, for their refugee politics. The truth is that they give asylum to four times more people than what we do in Sweden", said Gustav Fridolin, the Green Party's spokesman for refugee issues, speaking in central Malmo yesterday on the World Refugee Day. A number of asylum and immigrants' groups and political parties in Malmo wanted to pay attention to the day at a meeting in the city centre. Consecutive speakers spoke on a shameful Swedish refugee policy and Mr Fridolin heavily attacked the migration minister Barbro Holmberg. "Sending back people who risk persecution and torture is un-human behavior", Mr Fridolin said.

(Sydsvenska Dagbladet online www.sydsvenskan.se, 21 June 2006)

Iraqis flee from persecution to Sweden

The dangerous situation in Iraq has led to a mass emigration of Iraqi citizens to the neighboring countries. The refugees say they are being persecuted for belonging to the "wrong" ethnic group or having the "wrong" occupation. Those who manage to escape live in fear of the Iraqi death patrols. Many others are never granted passage to the neighboring countries, many of them Christian Iraqis who are denied asylum to the Islamic countries. According to the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket), most of the Iraqi citizens who seek asylum in Sweden come from Southern Iraq. A majority of them are Christians or members of another smaller non-Muslim minority.

(Svenska Dagbladet, SPR translation, 21 June 2006)

UN requests increased support for refugees

The World Refugee Day was yesterday marked by the UN with the theme "Hope". At Norrmalmstorg in Stockholm, Clowns Without Borders, among others, made visible refugees' hope for a brighter future. "If there is one common trait among the tens of millions of refugees that we at the UN refugee agency have helped over the past 55 years, it's the fact that despite losing everything, they never give up hope," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres in a statement made at the World Refugee Day. UNHCR currently cares for some 20.8 million refugees spread all over the world. "The international community needs to devote much more attention to the transition between relief and development, to rebuilding societies which have been ripped apart by violence," said Guterres in his statement. At the same time as the number of refugees has fallen worldwide, the number of internally displaced people has increased, as is the case in Darfur in Sudan, Uganda and Congo- Kingshasa.

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External Relations Unit
UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries, Stockholm
swest@unhcr.org
www.unhcr.se