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UNHCR: DEEP CONCERN OVER REFUGEE DEPORTATION FROM JAPAN

TOKYO, 18 Jan. -- The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, is deeply concerned over Japan's unprecedented deportation of two Turkish Kurds recognized as refugees under UNHCR's Statute. Japanese authorities deported the two refugees to Turkey on Tuesday, Jan. 18, despite last-minute appeals by UNHCR and human rights groups.

In a note verbale sent earlier Tuesday to the Minister of Justice, UNHCR urged the government not to send back these refugees, pointing out that such a move would represent an act of "refoulement" prohibited under international refugee law.

UNHCR said it had taken steps to seek third country resettlement for the refugees. The persons deported are a Turkish Kurd and his 20-year-old son. His wife and three other children are facing the same fate. UNHCR considers the deportation contrary to Japan's obligations under international law. The deportation is unprecedented and contrasts with Japan's humanitarian assistance towards refugees and disaster victims abroad.

The two persons deported had exhausted all legal remedies to remain in Japan and were considered as refugees by UNHCR. The refugee agency had made previous interventions on their behalf.

Until now, the Japanese authorities have provided UNHCR with the possibility to seek durable solutions for such refugees, including local integration or, in some cases, third country resettlement in accordance with the refugee agency's mandate. The "refoulement" of these refugees represents a disturbing departure from that practice.

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