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ORAM CO-PUBLISHES FIRST REPORT

ON SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR LGBT ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN TURKEY

*Based on In-Depth Interviews with Iranian LGBTs,
Report Focuses on Violence & Protection Gaps*

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San Francisco, CA (July 07, 2009) – ORAM – Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration published its research report today on perils facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey.

“Unsafe Haven: The Security Challenges Facing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Turkey” is a comprehensive account of the crushing burdens LGBT refugees face in a country that is increasingly a crossroads for mixed migration flows from Asia and Africa to Europe. Forced to endure violence and insufficient police protection, they are also deprived of basic services, including medical care.

The report is based on in-depth interviews with forty-six mostly Iranian LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey. Co-published with the Istanbul-based NGO, Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly Turkey, the research sheds light on the violence and protection gaps threatening these refugees, and on the failure of local police, government agencies, NGOs and the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR), to provide them sufficient protection.

“This watershed report should be seen in the context of abuses against asylum seekers and refugees based on sexual orientation and gender identity worldwide,” said ORAM executive director Neil Grungras. “Over eighty countries criminalize homosexual conduct and seven maintain the death penalty for consensual same-sex acts.”

Having escaped persecution in their home countries, LGBT refugees must reside in small towns in Turkey’s interior while they wait as long as three years to be recognized as refugees by the UNHCR and then be resettled in third countries. Afraid to leave their homes due to violence from local communities, they also have very limited access to medical care, social support or employment.

Many of those interviewed described a lack of sufficient police protection in response to their complaints of violence, including admonitions that they stay at home or dress “like a man” to avoid being targeted. Others reported being evicted from their homes on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The few able to work described being violently forced off the job when their LGBT status became known.

“Significant steps must be taken to make LGBT refugees and asylum seekers safer in Turkey and in many other places throughout the world,” said Mr. Grungras. “The violence and abuses will diminish only when all responsible parties begin giving the problem the intensive and serious attention it deserves.”

Turkey was named one of the worst countries in the world for refugees in the 2009 World Refugee Survey, published last month by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. Discrimination and hate crimes against LGBT individuals are commonplace in Turkey, where ten transgender and gay individuals have been murdered since the beginning of 2009.

The plight of Iranian LGBTs in Turkey was among the issues discussed at the UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs in Geneva, Switzerland last month. A panel discussion moderated by Mr. Grungras titled “Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Refugee Rights: A Protection Gap?” was the first-ever official forum dedicated to LGBT refugees at the UNHCR convocation. The workshop explored a variety of LGBT refugee issues including refugee status determination, protection of social/economic rights and physical security in countries of first asylum, detention, and resettlement.

For more information, visit www.oraminternational.org.

About ORAM

Founded in 2009, ORAM – Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration is the first international NGO focusing on refugees fleeing sexual and gender based violence. A new kind of network spanning national, ethnic, religious, racial and gender lines, ORAM provides clients with free legal representation and conducts advocacy and education on their behalf. For more information go to www.oraminternational.org.