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Home Office

NEWS RELEASE

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TURKISH ASYLUM APPLICANTS

Nineteen Turkish passengers arrived at Heathrow, carried by Yugoslav Airlines (JAT), on March 20 from Istanbul via Belgrade. They held valid Turkish passports. The group consisted of five families with close links between them. Three of the families comprised husband, wife and three children; the other two families were couples without children.

All members of the group claimed asylum on arrival. During consideration of their claims they were all detained at Harmondsworth Detention Centre until Tuesday, May 5 since when the men have been in Pentonville and the childless wives in Holloway; the wives with children have continued to be held at Harmondsworth.

The applications for asylum have now been rejected and the entire group have been refused leave to enter the United Kingdom. They were returned direct to Istanbul yesterday (May 5, 1988) in an aircraft chartered by JAT. At the request of JAT, escorts were provided by the Metropolitan Police, and a doctor also travelled on the aircraft. The entire cost of removal will be, in accordance with the Immigration Act 1971, met by JAT. Under the Act the cost of detention also falls on the owners or agents of the aircraft in which they arrived.

The nineteen Turks claimed to be Kurds but the interviews conducted with them cast grave doubts on that claim: they did not live in a Kurdish area of Turkey, were not fluent in the language and had little knowledge of Kurdish culture.

The group adopted a hostile and potentially violent attitude from the moment of their arrival. They resisted attempts to remove them from the airport and threatened self-injury, suicide and violence to their children if they were not allowed to remain in the UK.

The cases have been brought to the attention of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service who have indicated that they did not wish to intervene.

Mr Tim Renton, Minister of State, Home Office
said today:

"The interests of fair immigration control are not served by giving in to threats of violence and self-injury. This is true both of individual cases and of organised groups. However hard and difficult the latter are to handle, we will be firm in returning to their country of origin those who seek to evade our controls and who do not meet the well known and respected criteria for refugee status".