



Jesuit Refugee Service
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A coordinated EU response to the Libyan crisis is needed now

JRS urges EU governments to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable refugees

(Brussels, Rome, Valletta) – The Jesuit Refugee Service welcomes the actions and statements by several European governments since the Libyan crisis began. The meetings of the EU foreign ministers on 10 March and the European Council on 11 March are the moments to move to more coordinated action.

The evacuation of Egyptians in Libya by the Maltese, French and UK governments, and offers of aid by Italy are all welcome steps. Yet this response must not be limited to Libyans and migrant workers – the approximately 11,000 refugees in the country should not be forgotten.

The EU fact-finding mission sent by High Representative Catherine Ashton is a first step. In addition to ensuring concrete measures are taken to halt the violence in Libya and the delivery of ongoing and adequate humanitarian aid is guaranteed, JRS earnestly appeals to EU governments to:

- a. Identify and relocate within the EU asylum seekers and refugees trapped in Libya; and
- b. Develop an emergency plan to deal with the spontaneous arrival of refugees and migrants into the European Union, including the full activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) if numbers increase, and the suspension of the Dublin Regulation in relation to Italy and Malta

While many migrants in the country are being evacuated by their host governments and the International Organisation for Migration, refugees have nowhere to go. Refugees and asylum seekers stuck in Libya are extremely vulnerable to attacks. In the past days, JRS has received reports of innocent sub-Saharan Africans being beaten, stabbed and even killed, as they are wrongly suspected of being mercenaries hired by Gaddafi to kill Libyans.

Since mid-February, approximately 180,000 people have fled Libya, with thousands arriving daily in Tunisia and Egypt. Mediterranean nations cannot be expected to bear the responsibility of protecting these refugees alone. In times of crisis, European nations are called upon to demonstrate their commitment to the respect of human dignity and rights.

The 1951 refugee convention is based on the principle of responsibility sharing. Where states evade this responsibility, it is refugees who pay the consequences. If Tunisia can offer protection to tens of thousands of men, women and children fleeing generalised violence, European governments should be in a position to ease the suffering of the most vulnerable.

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Notes to the editor:

JRS works in more than 50 countries worldwide, providing assistance to approximately 500,000 forcibly displaced persons. Its mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees, asylum seekers and forcibly displaced persons.

JRS has offices in 12 European countries, including two operating in the southern Mediterranean region: Italy and Malta. JRS Italy provides healthcare, emergency assistance, language training and accommodation services, as well as raising awareness of refugee rights. In 2010, JRS Italy served more than 20,000 individuals in Rome, Palermo, Catania, Trento, Vicenza. In Malta, the JRS team offers legal, social and pastoral services to asylum seekers in detention centres and open reception centres, as well as raising public awareness of refugee-related issues.

The JRS European regional office advocates on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers and the forcibly displaced towards the European Union institutions. In coordination with the European country offices, JRS Europe implements activities in the strategic areas: migrant detention, destitution and the externalisation of EU asylum, migration and border policy.