



Jesuit Refugee Service Malta

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2 March 2011

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Eritrean Asylum Seekers Stranded in Libya Appeal for Help

Reports indicate that sub-Saharan African asylum seekers and migrants in Libya have been beaten and killed amidst the turmoil that has gripped the country

(Valletta, 2 March 2011) – Some 2000 Eritrean asylum seekers stranded in Libya have made a desperate appeal for help to the Catholic Church in Tripoli. Bishop Giovanni Martinelli, Apostolic Vicar of Tripoli, has urged the international community to rescue them by providing a way out of Libya to safety.

As tension escalates in Libya and States rush to evacuate their nationals, sub-Saharan African asylum seekers are all but forgotten. JRS Malta joins its voice to that of the Church in Libya and urges the international community not to forget these asylum seekers who do not have anyone to protect them, least of all their country of origin, which they fled in fear of their life.

“Unable to obtain the protection of their government, asylum seekers are stuck in Libya, where they are extremely vulnerable to attacks,” said Jesuit Fr Joseph Cassar, JRS Malta director. “In the past days we have heard 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 the Libyan people.”

JRS Malta therefore earnestly appeals to EU member states, including Malta, and the rest of the international community to take immediate and concrete action to provide protection to this very vulnerable population by providing resettlement opportunities for them.

While commending Malta's immediate and effective response to the crisis by facilitating the evacuation of thousands of foreign nationals seeking to leave Libya, we also call upon the Government of Malta to undertake urgent measures, as an extraordinary humanitarian gesture, to offer safe transit to asylum seekers who need to leave Libya and reach a place of refuge.

“It is clear that urgent, multi-lateral action is needed, as Malta cannot do this alone,” Fr Cassar added.

Background information:

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)

JRS is an international non-governmental organisation, with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees and forcibly displaced people. In Europe JRS is present in 12 countries, with a regional office in Brussels. For more on JRS activities throughout Europe, visit www.jrseurope.org.

Related Links

The response of the Catholic Church in Libya

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/as-catholics-flee-libya-church-responds-with-prayer-charitable-works/>

Bishop Giovanni Martinelli of Tripoli appeals for evacuation of Eritreans

<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=28440&lan=eng>

Bishop Giovanni Martinelli of Tripoli appeals for evacuation of Eritreans (includes reference to a communiqué by Apostolic Nuncio to Malta and Libya – *text in Italian*)

<http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=35759&lan=ita>

Eritrean community in Italy – updates in Italian and English

<http://habeshia.blogspot.com/>