



Jesuit Refugee Service

EUROPEAN REGIONAL OFFICE, aisbl

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Protecting refugees and asylum seekers stranded in Libya

Who are the people of concern?

- Persons who are in Libya after having fled from their country of origin due to persecution.
- Many are from sub-Saharan African countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. There are also persons from Iraq and Pakistan.
- UNHCR estimates that there are 8,000 recognized refugees, and 3,200 registered asylum seekers.
- But there are other potential asylum seekers who have not had the opportunity to register themselves due to an inability to make contact with UNHCR, notably Eritreans who were released from detention in the second half of 2010 and are now residing in the eastern part of Libya.

What is their situation?

- Some are already registered with UNHCR, either as recognized refugees or as asylum seekers.
- Most are located in an urban environment. For example, there are approximately 2,000 Eritreans in Tripoli and 300 in Benghazi. A portion of Eritreans in Benghazi were gathered near to the sea port in the hopes of fleeing Libya by boat, but have now been moved to a Red Cross camp. They are afraid to leave the camp for fear of attack, and they are afraid to seek refuge in Egypt as the country is known for carrying out deportations to Eritrea.
- We are particularly concerned for the fate of sub-Saharan Africans. We have received reports that many are being mistaken for mercenaries in Gaddafi's army. In addition sub-Saharan Africans are in general vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and violence in Libya, all of which is now exacerbated in Gaddafi controlled zones.
- Sub-Saharan Africans have been evicted from their homes, robbed, beaten and even killed. Numerous have gone missing after leaving their homes to look for food and other basic necessities. Many Eritreans are vulnerable to extortion as they are desperate to flee Libya by any means possible.
- Eritreans in Tripoli have appealed to the local Catholic Church for help, who have responded by provided accommodation for as many as possible. The Church has also registered more than 2,000 Eritrean asylum seekers for possible evacuation.
- It is impossible for most to seek refuge in Tunisia or Egypt, due to lack of reliable and safe transport and economic means.

What does JRS advocate for?

- JRS urges the EU member states to evacuate refugees and asylum seekers stranded in Libya, and to offer: 1) resettlement for those who are already recognized as refugees by UNHCR, and 2) access to European territory and to member state asylum procedures for those who need to submit an application for international protection.

Why?

- These persons face real danger to their lives. They cannot go back to their home country for fear of persecution.
- Tunisia and Egypt do not have the capacity to offer long-term protection to these persons. Since February, 150,000 have fled Libya towards Tunisia, and 118,000 towards Egypt. These two countries are already overburdened and facing a humanitarian crisis.
- The European Union must show humanitarian resolve and solidarity in this time of need. Relocating refugees stuck in Libya to Europe may encourage Tunisia and Egypt to keep their borders open for persons fleeing from violence.

On 8th March, 58 Eritrean refugees were evacuated from Tripoli and relocated to Italy by the Italian army. This was done in close cooperation between the Catholic Church in Libya, the Italian embassy in Libya and the Italian ministries of foreign and interior affairs. These persons have been received at a centre for asylum seekers in Crotona.

Long-term implications

There is also a need to review EU and member state cooperation with dictatorships as in Libya or Belarus. If any lessons are to be learned from current events in the Maghreb region, it is that these dictatorships cannot be considered as partners for the EU when it comes to border controls and migration politics.

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The Jesuit Refugee Service accompanies, serves and advocates for refugees, asylum seekers and the forcibly displaced in 50 countries around the world.

JRS is present in 12 European countries. Staff and volunteers visit migrants who are in detention, provide services to those left destitute and work to ensure the protection of migrants who arrive at the EU's borders.

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