

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Libya: Refugees face imminent expulsion

Amnesty International has received reports that Libya is planning to deport dozens of refugees recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Libya.

The organization fears that these refugees, who include Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somali and Liberian nationals, may be forcibly returned to their home country within hours or days. The refugees, including children and infants, are currently being detained at the deportation centre of the immigration department in Tripoli.

The news follows reports that hundreds of foreign nationals who recently arrived in Italy were deported from Crotona in the south of Italy to Libya on 20 December. The operation bore similarities to the one that took place on the Italian island of Lampedusa in October 2004, when hundreds of newly arrived African and Middle Eastern nationals were speedily returned to Libya without adequate safeguards.

Amnesty International reiterates its call to the Italian government to guarantee that foreign nationals arriving in Italian territory have access to a fair and satisfactory asylum procedure. The organization reminds the Italian government of its obligation to admit asylum-seekers and refugees to its territory without discrimination.

Amnesty International urges the Libyan government to halt all deportations of recognized refugees and to grant all refugees and asylum-seekers the opportunity to challenge any decision to deport them. The organization further urges the Libyan government to give UNHCR access to those deported to Libya from Italy in order that they may monitor their safety and report any violations of their fundamental rights, including the right to seek and enjoy asylum in Libya, if they so choose.

Background

Amnesty International has long-standing and ongoing concerns about the lack of adequate and comprehensive asylum legislation in Italy. Despite the Italian Ministry of Interior's assurances of acting lawfully, Amnesty International remains deeply troubled by the apparent speed used in deporting hundreds of people from Crotona in December. The organization fears that the Italian government's recent attempts to deal with arrivals by sea risk seriously compromising the fundamental right to seek and enjoy asylum and the principle of "non-refoulement" that prohibits the forcible return of an individual to a territory where s/he would be at risk of serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International expressed similar concerns in October 2004 when hundreds of people were deported from the Italian island of Lampedusa to Libya. The organization fears that the third country

nationals sent from Italy to Libya may be at risk of arbitrary detention, or detention on charges, including actual or alleged illegal entry into and exit from Libya, and of ill-treatment while in detention.

Despite being a state party to the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and, therefore, bound not to return anyone to a country where they face serious human rights violations, Libya has violated this obligation on several instances in 2004. This is exemplified by two incidents of deportation of hundreds of Eritreans back to their country of origin in July and August 2004; many of those returned to Eritrea are now believed to be detained incommunicado in a secret prison where conditions are harsh.

Public Document

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