

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

EU PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: IOR 61/021/2006 (Public)
Date: 04 October 2006

JHA: Closing eyes to human rights leaves asylum seekers and migrants at risk

(Brussels, 4 October) Amnesty International is concerned about the EU's moves to give financial support to countries such as Libya to tackle irregular migration, without seeking any type of guarantees that the rights of asylum seekers and migrants will be upheld in the process.

In a letter to the Finnish Presidency ahead of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International acknowledged the need to regulate migration flows to Europe but criticized its blank-check approach.

Libya's involvement raises particular concerns. It is a country with a known record of serious human rights violations that has not signed up to the Geneva Refugee Convention and where UNHCR has limited scope to operate.

"Commissioner Frattini stated that it is not about the money but about the political message the EU is sending to Libya. That is precisely what we are worried about," says Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

"The EU is in fact signalling that in exchange for collaboration, it is ready to close its eyes. It is again an example of how the EU's rhetoric of seeking balanced solutions is not matched by its actions," added Oosting.

The human rights organization is also troubled by the apparent lack of information about the people that have been stopped or sent back between Member States and third countries. There have been reports of abuse and even deaths.

"With so much emphasis in turning people back no one seems to be keeping track of what happens to those returned. A monitoring system should be implemented by the EU urgently in order to clarify the procedures and help prevent abuses," said Oosting.

Amnesty International called on the JHA Council to ensure that respect for human rights is a pre-condition of any cooperation with countries of transit or origin and that both short and long-term strategies on irregular immigration are grounded in respect for the basic rights of migrants.