

PUBLIC

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16 June 2008

Further Information on UA 165/08 (MDE 12/011/2008, 12 June 2008) – Forcible return/Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

EGYPT Up to 900 Eritrean asylum-seekers

A further 490 Eritrean asylum-seekers were deported to Massawa in Eritrea, on special daily Egypt Air flights from Aswan International airport. Hundreds more are apparently detained at Central Security Forces camp in Shallal, south of Aswan. The camp has served as a gathering point for asylum-seekers before they are taken to Aswan airport. On 12 June, a security official confirmed that 200 Eritreans had been "sent back home" the previous day.

On 15 June, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt announced that the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt would be granted access to the Eritreans to assess their asylum claims.

According to information available to Amnesty International, about 270 Eritreans have been transported to Shallal camp from police stations in the Red Sea cities of Hurgada, Halayeb and Shalateen, and 35 from Aswan police station. All police stations near Aswan as well as Idfu police station, north of Aswan, are now empty of Eritrean asylum-seekers; most of them were deported but some are still detained in Shallal camp. Among those who had been detained in Idfu and are now believed to have been deported are about 25 Eritreans who had been awaiting a court ruling on charges of illegal entry to Egypt, scheduled for 21 June.

On 12 June, 200 Eritrean asylum-seekers were reportedly deported, and a further 90 on 15 June, all on Egypt Air flights. On 13 and 14 June, 200 were similarly reportedly deported on two flights carrying 100 each.

The asylum-seekers were told they were being deported. Some begged the security forces not to deport them and even threatened to kill themselves. They were searched to make sure they were not carrying anything they could use to harm themselves. They did not physically resist being put on the plane, but continued to cry and beg for mercy. Among the asylum-seekers were women and children.

Since 11 June, the Egyptian authorities have organized mass deportation of Eritrean asylum-seekers. So far about 690 have been reportedly deported; up to 900 more are at risk of deportation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued guidelines to all governments opposing return to Eritrea of rejected Eritrean asylum seekers on the grounds of the record of serious human rights violations in Eritrea. These guidelines are still in force.

Refugees and asylum-seekers returned to Eritrea have been detained incommunicado, and tortured. Two asylum-seekers returned to Eritrea by the German authorities on 14 May are believed to have been arrested on arrival, and have not been seen since. Another asylum-seeker returned from the UK in November 2007 was detained in inhumane conditions and ill-treated before being released.

Thousands of people are detained incommunicado in Eritrea, in secret and indefinitely, without charge or trial. They have been arrested for suspected opposition to the government, practicing their religious beliefs as members of banned evangelical or other churches, evading military conscription or trying to flee the country.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or your own language:

- welcoming the authorities' 15 June decision to give the UNHCR access to the Eritrean asylum-seekers held at the Central Security Forces camp in Shallat, but expressing concern that they have deported a further 490 Eritreans since 12 June;
- calling on the authorities to stop all forcible returns of asylum-seekers to Eritrea immediately;
- urging them to respect Egypt's international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the UN Convention Against Torture not to forcibly return asylum-seekers to Eritrea, where they would be at risk of torture and other serious human rights abuses.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Interior

Minister Habib Ibrahim El Adly

Ministry of the Interior

25 Al-Sheikh Rihan Street

Bab al-Louk, Cairo, Egypt

Fax: +20 2 279 0682

Email: moi@idsc.gov.eg

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Minister Ahmed Ali Aboul Gheit

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Corniche al-Nil, Maspiro

Cairo, Egypt

Fax: +20 22 574 8822

+20 22 390 8159

+20 22 574 9533

E-mail: minexter@idsc1.gov.eg

Salutation: Dear Minister

EgyptAir Holding Company Headquarters

Captain Tawfik Assy,

Chairman & CEO of EgyptAir Holding Company

EgyptAir Administrative Complex

Fax: +202 24183715 / +202 26964229

Email: callcenter@egyptair.com

Salutation: Dear Captain

Egypt Air offices in your country

Web site: <http://www.egyptair.com/English/ContactUs/WorldWideOffices/>

and to diplomatic representatives of Egypt accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 July 2008.