

AI Index: PRE 01/061/2011
14 February 2011

Italy urged to protect migrants' rights as thousands leave Tunisia

Amnesty International is urging the authorities of Italy and the European Union to protect the human rights of thousands of migrants from Tunisia arriving on the Italian mainland and island of Lampedusa.

More than 4,000 people have arrived in Italy in recent days following political unrest in their country. There have previously been many reports of asylum-seekers' rights being abused in Italy following their arrival from countries around the Mediterranean Sea.

"While we recognize the challenges of dealing with very large and mixed migration flows, the relevant authorities must ensure that previous instances of asylum-seekers' rights being abused are not repeated," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

"The relevant authorities must ensure that all those seeking asylum should be able to access territory and fair, satisfactory asylum procedures and be informed of their rights.

"No one should be forcibly expelled to a place where they face serious human rights abuses, or without adequate consideration of their circumstances and needs for protection. Any decision to detain a person should be considered individually."

Large numbers of people were forced to sleep outdoors for several days before the Italian authorities reopened the reception centre on Lampedusa.

The Italian authorities have called the recent wave of migration a "humanitarian emergency" and publicly called the European Union through FRONTEX to assist in stemming the flows of migrants from North Africa.

Italy's Minister of Foreign affairs has announced patrols along the Italian coasts are to be reinforced along with mechanisms "that until a month ago were able to reduce irregular/ clandestine migration to zero".