

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Italy: All migrants must be protected against attacks and exploitation

In the wake of two days of violent clashes between migrant workers and local residents in the town of Rosarno in Southern Italy, which led to over a thousand migrants fleeing or being removed from their homes, Amnesty International is concerned that the Italian authorities are failing to protect the economic and social rights of migrants and protect them against a rising tide of xenophobia and racially-motivated violence. Amnesty International is also concerned that many of the displaced migrants, most of whom come from sub-Saharan Africa, remain vulnerable to further human rights violations.

The clashes in Rosarno were sparked when two migrant workers were shot with airguns in a drive-by shooting on the night of Thursday 7 January. Following the shooting, several hundred migrants marched through the town to protest against their discriminatory treatment and poor living conditions, setting fire to cars and clashing with riot police. The next day, local residents set up an informal road-block and occupied the local town hall in protest. In a number of separate incidents, two migrants were reportedly beaten with iron bars, five deliberately run over and a further two injured by shot-gun pellets. In total, 53 persons were hospitalised, including 21 migrants, 14 local residents and 18 police officers. Order was only restored in the town after the departure of most of the migrant workers, hundreds of whom were removed from the town by the authorities. Following their departure, many of the temporary shelters they had set up in abandoned buildings around the town were demolished by the authorities.

The Italian Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni has blamed the unrest on the legacy of uncontrolled migration. While noting that anyone responsible for violent criminal acts should be investigated and prosecuted, Amnesty International is concerned that the root causes of the events in Rosarno are the widespread exploitation of rural migrant workers and the failure, on the part of both central and regional authorities, to take steps to address the rising xenophobia across the country.

The trafficking and exploitation of migrant workers has resulted in thousands of migrants in the area around Rosarno, and many more elsewhere in Italy, earning as little as two Euros an hour, while living in makeshift shelters without running water, electricity or heating. Amnesty International has previously raised concerns that the recently adopted "Security Package", a set of laws criminalizing irregular migration, has made irregular migrants even more vulnerable to exploitation by restricting their access to employment, housing and essential services, while simultaneously discouraging victims of abuse from reporting their grievances.

The rising xenophobia in Italy is reflected in the increasingly vocal anti-migrant and anti-Roma rhetoric of, in particular, regional and local politicians, as well as the growing number of racially motivated attacks by individuals and vigilante groups over the past eighteen months.

In order to address the root causes of the disturbances in Rosarno, Amnesty International accordingly calls on the Italian authorities to:

- Give a greater priority to combating racially motivated crimes, and in particular ensure that victims of these offences have access to effective remedies and that these crimes are investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice;
- Take greater steps to prevent national and local public authorities from promoting or inciting racial discrimination as required by Article 4(c) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Effectively combat trafficking in human beings and provide assistance to victims of trafficking in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings;
- Guarantee lawfully resident migrant workers equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation as required by Article 10 of the 1975 ILO Migrant Workers Convention;
- Reverse the measures in the recently adopted “Security Package” making irregular migration a criminal offence;
- Ensure all migrants are able effectively to access the right to adequate housing and living conditions, a right the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has indicated applies to everyone, regardless of status and includes the “right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity”.

Amnesty International is also concerned that many of the displaced migrants are at risk of further human rights violations. The Italian police has reported that 828 migrants were removed to two holding centers for foreigners in Crotona and Bari. Many of the migrants were living and working in Rosarno with official authorization. But many others are irregular migrants without authorization to remain in Italy. Amnesty International is concerned that many of these will face prolonged detention without consideration being given to alternative measures and that they may be deported without effective access to procedures and mechanisms that would allow them to establish claims for international protection or to otherwise challenge the basis of their deportation.

Many of those who have been removed from the locality by the authorities or were forced to flee their homes will now be unable to return to Rosarno on account of the demolition of their former places of residence and the lack of security. The forcible removal of people from their homes without due process, including the assurance of adequate alternative accommodation, amounts to forced eviction, in violation of international law. Even if their removal was undertaken as an emergency temporary measure, if they cannot return because their homes have been demolished, or because of the continuing threat of violence, the Italian authorities are obliged under international law to provide them with adequate alternative accommodation and effective remedies.

In response to the events in Rosarno, Amnesty International accordingly calls on the Italian authorities to:

- Ensure that all allegations of racially motivated violence are effectively investigated, that anyone reasonably identified as responsible to be brought to justice and that the victims are receive effective reparation, including adequate compensation;
- Ensure that the principles of non refoulement and due process are protected by providing all migrants, where appropriate, effective access to a fair and satisfactory asylum procedure or process to challenge the basis of any proposed deportation with full procedural safeguards;
- Ensure that those displaced from Rosarno are able to return to their previous places of residence or offered suitable alternative accommodation elsewhere in Italy.

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