

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### Italy: Over 100 reportedly “pushed back” at sea

Amnesty International is greatly concerned by reports that a “push-back” operation was carried out on 21 August after Italian vessels intercepted a boat travelling from North Africa towards Lampedusa. In the light of these reports, the organization calls on the Italian authorities to immediately clarify the circumstances of the episode and desist from any such operations in the future.

In the past, Italy’s “push-back” operations resulted in grave human rights violations, including the forcible removal of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to Libya where they faced arrest, torture and detention in appalling conditions.

According to media reports, on 21 August Italian vessels of the Financial Police and of the Coastal Guard intercepted a boat with over 110 people on board while in international waters in the Maltese search and rescue zone approximately 35 miles off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa. A few of them, including a man in a wheelchair and two women, were taken to Lampedusa and once there were allowed to disembark, while the remainder of those on board were eventually made to board the Italian navy ship *Borsini* and were then transferred onto Tunisian vessels in order to take them to Tunisia.

Amnesty International wishes to reiterate our call to the Italian authorities that any patrolling of national or international waters should have as its main objective ensuring the safety and security of those found at sea. In particular, patrolling boats should search and rescue those found in distress and provide them with immediate succour, as opposed to seeking to intercept them with a view to “pushing them back” to the country of departure or to a third country.

Italian authorities should not intercept refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants at sea unless it is with a view to providing succour or for law enforcement purposes on the basis of reasonable suspicion.

By intercepting and “pushing back” individuals at sea who may be trying to reach Italy without identifying them, screening them and giving them access to fair and satisfactory asylum procedures to those who may be entitled to international protection, Italy is violating, among other things, the principle of *non-refoulement*. International human rights obligations also require states to ensure that people are not collectively and summarily removed and that anyone is given an effective opportunity to challenge their removal. Anyone who wishes to challenge their removal, expulsion or deportation should be provided with the means of doing so in full compliance with Italy’s obligations under international, regional and domestic human rights and refugee law and standards.

Amnesty International is also concerned by reports that this “push-back” may have been carried out as a result of an agreement reached by Italian and Tunisian authorities on 5 April 2011, whose content has not been fully disclosed to the public. The organization has repeatedly called the Italian authorities to make the agreement public and to ensure that Italy’s international human rights obligations and commitments are the cornerstone of any cooperation with North African countries in the sphere of “migration control”. Any bilateral or multilateral agreements in this field must include adequate legal and procedural safeguards which can ensure full respect of the rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

**See also:**

*Q&A: North Africa migrants in Italy*

*Italy urged to respect human rights and refugee rights in responding to migrant and asylum seeker flows from Tunisia*

*Thousands stranded in 'appalling' conditions on Italian island*

*Italy: Avert another humanitarian crisis and desist from summary removals*

*Italy: Amnesty International findings and recommendations to the Italian authorities following the research visit to Lampedusa and Mineo*

*Italy: New legislation violates right to liberty for migrants*

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