

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL EU PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 29/002/2007 (Public)

15 January 2007

JHA: EU SHOULD NOT GIVE LICENSE TO ABUSE OF MIGRANTS

(Brussels, 15 January) Unless Morocco offers guarantees that migration management operations can be conducted without abuse of migrants and refugees, the EU should reconsider giving further financial aid to this country, said Amnesty international in a letter to EU Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs meeting today in Dresden. (available at www.amnesty-eu.org)

On 23, 25 and 29 of December, Moroccan police conducted violent raids with the aim of expelling sub-Saharan nationals living in the country, to the Algerian border. The close timing of the raids with Christmas and New Year almost made them pass unnoticed in Europe. But recent testimony of migrants and refugees who have made it back to Rabat show a disturbing pattern that calls for a strong EU response.

Reminiscent of the events of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005 and 2006 (documented by Amnesty International in report AI Index Eur 41/009/2006), civilians were once again rounded up by force by Moroccan police, coerced to board buses that took them close to the Algerian border where, after being separated into small groups, they were abandoned in different areas of the desert.

As is often the case, such actions gave way to even further abuses. Left in the desert areas without food or water, men, women and children as young as 11 months found themselves in a extremely vulnerable situation that according to several testimonies resulted in cases of beatings and rape.

Amnesty International continues to be seriously concerned about the fate of around one hundred migrants of whom there is no news since they were taken to the border area.

“Operations like these seem to have turned into a pattern that the EU cannot afford to ignore since it is only getting worse: cooperation with EU countries is now being invoked to justify abuse and this time refugees and asylum seekers were also taken,” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International’s EU Office, commenting on the 10 recognized refugees and 60 asylum seekers whose documentation was allegedly confiscated by police.

The EU should be alarmed by the statements of Moroccan authorities claiming that the operations were a response to EU and Member States’ requests of cooperation in the fight against irregular migration.

These raids and their brutal consequences should be an explicit warning for the EU to act with great caution when cooperating with third countries in the field of migration.

"Recent declarations from the German Presidency about getting tough on illegal immigration after what just happened in Morocco require clarification that leaves no doubt that the EU will not tolerate abuses to secure cooperation" said Oosting.

"Financial incentives for migration management and negotiations on a readmission agreement should be reviewed until the EU has concrete assurances that rights are not being violated. Failure of Ministers to respond with a strong signal will be a license to more abuse and effectively associate the EU directly to such violations," he added.

For further comment/background and interviews:

Amnesty International EU Office (Brussels)

Tel: +32-2-5021499

Fax: +32-2-5025686

Email: AmnestyIntl@aieu.be

Web-site: <http://www.amnesty-eu.org>