

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This is brief information about the conditions of Eritrean refugees who are detained in Misrata Prison, Libya and Egypt.

### **Eritrea Refugees in Libya?**

There are about 600 Eritrean refugees, who are incarcerated in very bad conditions in Libya refugee camps. They are mostly single men, who were former members of Eritrean national service. They have either deserted from the army or dodged forced conscriptions. There are a few women and children born in the prison. The refugees are mostly caught while crossing the Mediterranean and salvaged from sinking boats. Some were caught while they were in preparation to travel across the Mediterranean, where as others were picked up from their houses.

### **The Conditions of Eritrean Refugees in Misrata Prison, Libya**

Eritrean refugees are held in a prison called Misrata which is named after the city of Misrata. Misrata is a third largest city of Libya and found in north part of Libya along the coasts of Mediterranean. It is one of the main prisons in the country. Some of the Eritrea refugees stayed in other prisons and until all of them was brought to Misrata.

Eritrean refugees are held in an inhuman condition in Misrata prison. The length of the stay ranges from a few months to three years. They are subjected to torture, intimidation and inhuman treatment. Human right groups have reported that an organ was removed from a female refugee. The person was taken to hospital when she was sick. After her treatment, she found a big scare in her body. This was later confirmed by doctors in Italy, where she was resettled, that a kidney was removed from her.<sup>1</sup> Another refugee died in prison when he refused to take medical treatment without the supervision of UNHCR. Since UNHCR was not able to help him, he refused to take medical treatment and died due to lack medical treatment.<sup>2</sup> Some of the refugees have cell phones, and they communicate with outside world via phone and text message.

### **Eritrea refugees in Egypt**

There are thousands of Eritrean refugees in Egypt. Similar to those in Libya, there are a number of refugees who deserted the Eritrea army and come to Egypt via Sudan. There are also some

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/show.php?id=3380>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/show.php?id=3380>

refugees who manage to escape from Eritrea by bribing immigration officials. Recently, there has been an increase in number of Eritrean refugee coming to Egypt with the hope going to Israel, where there are better job opportunities.

### **Crackdown of Eritrean refugees in Egypt**

Since Jun 2008, the government of Egypt has started to detain and deport Eritrea refugees. Amnesty International reported that about 1000 Eritrea refugees were deported and fears more could be deported.<sup>3</sup> Hundreds of refugees are still imprisoned and at risk of deportation. UNHCR has expressed its concern for lack of access to all refugees imprisoned.

### **Risks of ‘Refoulement’ or Deportation**

In both Libya and Egypt, hundreds of Eritrea refugees are under great risk of refoulement or deportation to their country. On the wake of the deportation, the Libyan government attempted to deport them, however, the interference of UNHCR, Refugee advocates and human right groups managed to temporarily stop the deportation. In 2004, the Libyan government deported a number of Eritrean refugees and they were arrested upon their return and subject to inhuman treatment and some reportedly died in prison. There are unconfirmed reports that some of those who were recently deported from Egypt have been imprisoned despite the government of Eritrea’s claims to the contrary.<sup>4</sup>

### **International Protection and Resettlement**

The UNHCR and other human right organization are monitoring the situation of Eritrea refugees in Libya and Egypt. UNHCR have registered the refugees and have done resettlement interview by going to their prison. About 30 refugees, mostly women and children were resettled to Italy and other countries. Reliable sources reveal that UNHCR plans to resettle them to other countries or move them to a holding centre in Rumania until a final solution is found. However, to our knowledge, there is less appetite on part of resettlement countries to take these refugees; and the relocation to Rumania has not yet materialized.

In Egypt, it was report that about 179 refugees from those imprisoned were interviewed by UNHCR. We hope that UNHCR will refer them for resettlement to safe place. The condition of

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions\\_details.asp?ActionID=460](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=460)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.shabait.com/staging/publish/article\\_008519.html](http://www.shabait.com/staging/publish/article_008519.html)

the refugees is getting worse and worse from time to time. Both the Libya and Egyptian governments' could deport those in the prison and detention centers if the international community could not find a durable solution to their problem.

### **References**

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