

NATIONS UNIES
LE HAUT COMMISSAIRE
POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS



UNITED NATIONS
THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

Case Postale 2500
1211 Genève 2
Suisse

16 October 2018

Dear concerned Members of the European Parliament,

I wish to thank you for your letter of 12 September, expressing concern over the serious humanitarian situation affecting refugees, migrants and other populations in Libya, which we share.

UNHCR is fully committed to pursuing protection and solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers who are currently in the country. This work is being carried out through our dedicated colleagues on the ground, who are operating in very challenging and dangerous circumstances which limit our scope of action.

As you know, the situation in Libya is extremely volatile and characterized by widespread insecurity. In August and September, heavy fighting between militias in Tripoli resulted in deaths, injuries and displacement in the capital. Clashes took place in close proximity to detention centres where refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were being held. Some reportedly escaped and remain in hiding, while others have disappeared and are suspected to have fallen prey to trafficking networks.

Against this backdrop, humanitarian access has been severely restricted. As of 1 October 2018, UNHCR and its partners have identified some 4,230 people of concern who are being held in official Libyan detention centres, where access is restricted and unpredictable. The number of persons held in unofficial facilities is unknown. Security permitting, UNHCR will resume its registration activities in detention centres over the coming days, targeting all persons of concern. However, some of the 33 detention centres known to us are out of reach, in particular in the East and in the South of the country.

Meanwhile, international support provided to the Libyan Coast Guard to help build its capacity has resulted in increased numbers of people – some of whom were in need of international protection – being intercepted or rescued at sea and returned to Libya, only to be placed in detention in appalling conditions. UNHCR has repeatedly made clear that it does not regard Libya as a safe country for the purpose of disembarkation, following rescue at sea beyond its territorial waters.

Despite this challenging context, UNHCR has continued to pursue innovative solutions to alleviate suffering and bring the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers to safety. Since November 2017, we have evacuated some 1,858 individuals, the vast majority (1,536) to an emergency transit centre in Niger. However, swift onward resettlement is needed in order to sustain this, and the centre has periodically reached the limit of 1,500 evacuees who can be accommodated at any given time. Some 312 individuals have also been evacuated to Italy and 10 to Romania.

Members of the European Parliament
(see attached list)



We continue to appeal to States to accelerate resettlement procedures for refugees stranded in Libya, and those evacuated to Niger, and would be grateful for the advocacy of the European Parliament in this regard. We are actively pursuing options for evacuation to countries of first asylum or directly to new asylum countries, as well as for the establishment of new emergency transit mechanisms from which solutions can be sought.

Meanwhile, we continue to press the Libyan authorities to provide alternatives to detention and release detainees, irrespective of their prospects for evacuation. To this end, we completed the rehabilitation of a transit facility in Tripoli in June 2018, which can house 1,000 vulnerable persons of concern and provide a safe location where registration can be carried out and solutions pursued. We hope that circumstances will allow us to open the facility shortly.

UNHCR is also working with countries of origin and transit to disseminate information about the risks involved in undertaking perilous journeys by land and sea, and calls on States to strengthen measures to prevent smuggling and trafficking. We have also urged targeted investments in countries of asylum and transit, as well as efforts to tackle the root causes of these movements more strategically and with substantive resources.

Recent events in the Mediterranean have also been troubling. The total numbers of arrivals in Europe has fallen, while the rate of deaths at sea has risen sharply. Measures pursued to stem irregular migration have included regrettable restrictions on the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in search and rescue operations.

UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have proposed a regional cooperative arrangement for ensuring predictable disembarkation and subsequent processing of persons rescued at sea. Negotiating ad hoc disembarkation must be avoided. At the European Council meeting in late June, European governments committed to a more collaborative, predictable and well-managed approach to dealing with all those rescued at sea. Until this is in place, the current arrangements will continue to put lives at risk.

I count on your advocacy in calling for these commitments to be turned into action and for the other matters set out above to be addressed, for which the engagement of European governments is essential. You may also wish to consider a visit to Libya in order to witness first-hand the challenges on the ground and to consider how parliamentarians can help support the search for solutions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Filippo Grandi', with a horizontal line above it.

Filippo Grandi



Ms. Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL)

Mr. Stefan Eck (GUE/NGL)

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