

PRESS RELEASE: 23 April 2013

Refugee Right's Protest in Front of EU delegation in Tunis, Tunisia

Recognised refugees who fled the war in Libya are trapped in Tunisia. Although they have refugee status they have no rights and no protection. In one month the Choucha refugee camp is going to close. Without residence, without protection, without food they will have to 'integrate' into Tunisian society; a society which is already under pressure because of rapid social change and severe unemployment. They are on hunger strike outside the UNHCR in Tunis to demand resettlement in a safe country.

Protest outside the EU delegation in Tunis

On 22 April 2013, a delegation of 20 refugees, out of the 262 refugees who are left without resettlement to a safe country, protested in front of the EU delegation in Tunis. Banners said: "We request the international community to focus on our demand." During the protest, Tunisian police came to the sit-in at the UNHCR to take away the tents.

Recognised but without protection

They have refugee status from UNHCR. But UNHCR has 'closed' the resettlement programme and they arrived too late. They will be 'locally integrated.' But Tunisia does not issue residence permits, they cannot work legally and they can be arrested by the police. Their camp, Choucha will be closed in one month; they have nowhere to go.

EU fought a war to protect civilians but now it ignores them

EU States played a major role in the war in Libya, they share responsibility for refugees fleeing that war. Of the thousands that fled Libya to Tunisian territory in 2011, there are now only a few hundred left in Choucha Camp.

Refugees forced to 'integrate' while facing discrimination and without residence permits

These recognised refugees are meant to be 'locally integrated' in Tunisia. They say it is impossible:

- 1) In their daily life they experience harsh racial and religious discrimination.
- 2) They don't believe Tunisia to be a safe country "due to the unstable situation" which continues

even two years after the revolution. In one city police disappeared due to political disturbances leaving refugees unprotected.

3) Traumatized refugees will be left without residence permits.

No asylum law in Tunisia to protect refugees

The Tunisian Constitution is still being written. Nothing concrete has been decided; neither asylum laws nor their legal status are sure once the refugees are 'locally integrated.'

Eritreans could not make 'local integration' work

A group of Eritreans were put in the southern Tunisian city of Medenine as part of the 'local integration programme'. This group of 34 refugees were unable to integrate. They were the target of numerous acts of discrimination. Finally, on 17 April, they left Medenine and went to Choucha Camp, to stress their demand to UNHCR to take responsibility.

Health problems for those on hunger strike

Yesterdays' protest in front of the EU delegation in Tunis, is part of an ongoing protest campaign of the refugees, demanding resettlement. Since 26 March 2013, around 40 embarked in a sit-in in front of the UNHCR and on 29 March the refugees started a hunger-strike which has led to several hospitalisations. This is putting the lives of these refugees in danger.

Protest and solidarity

On 11 April, they protested in front of the 'Kasbah,' the Tunisian Prime Minister's office, where they handed over a letter to the Tunisian government, asking it to refuse the 'local integration-programme.' This protest was accompanied by a wave of solidarity actions in front of UNHCR offices in Rabat, Paris, Den Haag and Berlin.

Then on the 19 April 2013 they engaged in a sit-in in front of the Constitutional Assembly of Tunisia, continuing to demand their right to resettlement to a country with effective asylum protection.

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