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GOVERNMENT MUST NOT RETURN MIGRANTS TO LIBYA



The government must not return the migrants who arrived in Malta this morning to Libya. There are two very good reasons why: the first is that the migrants will be subjected to torture and inhumane treatment if returned. And the second is that such an action would be a blatant violation of our international legal obligations.



We, the undersigned 11 NGOs, are shocked that the government is even considering sending back to Libya the group of migrants that arrived this morning. The group of 102 included 41 women and two babies. All are Somali, which means they could very well need protection.



The action contemplated by the government is precisely what the Prime Minister says it is not: it is a pushback, sending people who have come to our shores to seek well-deserved refuge, back to a country where they may well be killed.



We do not deny that the migrant issue is a challenge for the Maltese government to tackle. However, it is unacceptable to use innocent people to score points and to bargain, in a bid to put Malta in a stronger position at the European burden-sharing table.



That the migrants will face gross human rights abuses if returned to Libya is a certainty: those we met detailed the abuses they faced, especially in detention, among them brutal beatings and shootings, which left some permanently disabled. Those who return to Libya after attempting to reach Europe are singled out for especially harsh punishment. These claims are backed by the research of solid human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.



Last week, the Court of Appeal ruled that the forced return of two Somali nationals to Libya in 2004 violated their human rights. Of the six migrants who were returned then, only two made it back to Malta. The rest died in the desert when they were deported to the Libyan border after months of imprisonment in terrible conditions.



This is a litmus test for us not only as a government but as a nation: we need to avert the temptation to consider only our “national interest” and to remember that we have much wider moral and legal obligations. Only on Monday, in Lampedusa, Pope Francis called us to a change of heart towards “these brothers and sisters of ours trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace” and who instead find death. We call on the Maltese government not to send people back to torture and possibly even death.





This statement is being issued by the following organizations:

aditus foundation, Jesuit Refugee Service (Malta), Migrant's Network for Equality, SOS Malta, Malta Emigrants' Commission, KOPIN, Integra Foundation, Foundation for Shelter and Support of Migrants, Organisation for Friendship in Diversity, Koperativa Kumerc Gust and People for Change Foundation.



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