

UNHCR-Libya: the bid is rising, migrants pay the price

The UNHCR has just announced that the Libyan government asks him to close its office and stop activities in Libya.

To the indignation of people who, in the name of help given by the UNHCR to asylum seekers, deplore this injunction; Migreurop puts up its doubts: which price will Europe pay so that Mouammar Kadhafi authorizes again the presence of the UNHCR on his territory?

Indeed, the decision to evict the UNHCR is reached while the seventh round of negotiations on a partnership between EU and Tripoli began this Tuesday, 8th June. The main issues to be solved should focus on illegal immigration and the recognition of the International Court of Justice. To bring forward negotiations, Libya requires additional funding and equipment for monitoring land and sea borders. Beyond many control systems funding in this country since the early 2000s, how far the EU is ready to go?

In this haggling, the UNHCR plays an essential role: he endorses the crucial position occupied by Libya in the European policy on migration management for external borders. Thanks to the UNHCR's presence in Tripoli, Italy, which signed an agreement with Libya in August 2008, and Europe, pretend that *boats-people* pushed back to Libya found minimum security and protection. Everyone knows perfectly well that it is a 'smoke screen': the conditions under which migrants are treated in Libya are well documented and perfectly known by European authorities and institutions. Libya, which has not signed the Geneva Convention on refugees, abuses, locks up and deports thousands of migrants every year¹. Its southern border, where Europe invests to padlock it better, is already a cemetery for African Subsaharians trying to cross it.

Melissa Fleming, the UNHCR spokesperson, acknowledges the role assigned to her institution : "*all European governments using Libya as a place where people, fleeing from persecutions, could be received, would have to review this carefully, if UNHCR is no longer present there.*" We could not be more explicit: the presence of UNHCR in Libya allowed foremost to justify the outsourcing and deportation policy carried by the EU², which is now caught at its own game. Libya raises the bidding and the UNHCR is a part to these sordid negotiations: his return to Tripoli is already planned³.

Migreurop denounces the hypocritical attitude of the European Union and UNHCR, claiming to provide protection to asylum seekers, while real issues are elsewhere: to make Colonel Kadhafi the gendarme of European borders and the jailer of migrants seeking international protection or a better life.

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1 See the website Fortress Europe <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/>

2 In July 2009, the IOM and the UNHCR signed an agreement with Tripoli to «satisfy the needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Libya. » <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/media/press-briefing-notes/pbnAF/cache/offonce/lang/fr?entryId=25842>

3 « Libya: the UNHCR ready to discuss with Tripoli » http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i20h-TN-rG7W46d_H75eCLEs2ZvQ