



Struggling for life

■ A line of Nigerian migrants, waiting to register their names

The lucky ones, whose lives have been spared, face an uncertain future in squalid camps, abandoned ports and factories. As the political situation seems to be moving towards a solution, people in the field still struggle to make it through, especially vulnerable sub-Saharan African migrants and internally displaced Libyans escaping the mayhem triggered by six months of fighting between rebels and pro-Gaddafi forces. The European Commission Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection department (ECHO) has provided €80.5 million to support the victims of the conflict. Projects are being implemented by a number of partners, among which the International Migration Organization (IOM) and UNHCR, the UN body for refugees. A report from Janzour port, near Tripoli, where one thousand people have been stranded for months.

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JANZOUR, LIBYA – Waiting patiently to fill water from a trickling tap in Janzour port, near Tripoli, the gaunt and haggard faces of these migrants tell a story of haunting fear, before they disappear into the crowd of over a thousand Sub-Saharan Africans stranded in this tiny port.

Violent verbal exchanges, pushing and shoving, are inevitable among the weary asylum seekers from eight African countries, who have spent months facing rebels and looters, simmering heat and lack of food, forced labour and rape.

These people had no other choice but to leave homes in poverty stricken African countries, whatever the dangers. The pristine but treacherous water of the Mediterranean is a vessel of dreams for thousands of young men and women from Africa, as they attempt to cross to Europe for a fresh start. Annually, thousands of clandestine passen-

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gers put their destiny into the hands of smugglers to cross the Mediterranean into Europe, where their dreams await. But in the dark and glutinous waters, many die and their bodies are washed up on the beaches.

Here in Janzour, this group of migrants had dreamt of joining the thousands who fled during the six month conflict, when Libyan authorities were busy fighting rebels and their control over the port had relaxed. But the NATO fleet spread across the Mediterranean meant attempts at smuggling out were futile.

Jian, a 25-year-old half Nigerian, half Jamaican, is no exception. He steadily walks in a colorful hat, seemingly protecting his head from the scorching sun. He has been waiting to register, but the waiting is painstaking and couched with trepidation. “I want to go home, to Jamaica. I do not want to stay here,” says Jian, and others cannot hide their joy when they see aid workers arrive. “I wanted to go to Europe for work, but now I just want to return safe to my family,” says Latifa, a 22-year-old from Ghana.



■ A temporary shelter, built by African migrants



■ Othman Yalbas, representative of the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in Libya

“We know many people are locked in their houses and can’t move. We need to access them in order to offer safe repatriation”

Fear of being targeted

Ever since Colonel Gaddafi was pushed out of power, rebels have launched a manhunt against the thousands of suspected mercenaries hired by the ousted president to quell protesters. But the campaign saw many sub-Saharan Africans fall victim to arbitrary attacks as well. “The European Commission was ready to respond to this crisis,” says Thomas Dehrmann-Roy, an EU humanitarian expert deployed to Tripoli; “€80.5¹ million have been allocated for humanitarian activities, and we are here to make sure that needs are identified and addressed.”

Beside the rehabilitation for a large number of war-wounded, the support to the health sector, and the provision of relief and protection to the vulnerable displaced members of the population trapped throughout the country, the EU has been heavily engaged in the support for the evacuation of third country nationals and the provision of assistance to people fleeing Libya. “We know many people are locked in their houses and can’t move,” says Dehrmann-Roy. “This is a worrying issue that needs to be closely monitored.” “We need to access these people in order to offer them safe repatriation,” he concludes. “If they cannot return, we offer them protection.”

Meanwhile Othman Yalbas - representative of IOM in Libya, an implementing partner of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department - says the lack of security hampers aid efforts to locate migrants and IDPs. He says many Libyans originally from towns known to support Gaddafi have also been facing trouble and have escaped to Tripoli and elsewhere for fear of attacks. Reports say many towns near Misrata and Zenten have been attacked by rebels seeking revenge against the former regime’s collaborators. So far, 15 boats loaded with internally displaced people have been moved between Tripoli and Misrata, as well as Tripoli and Benghazi. Many others were sent to neighboring countries: Tunisia, Chad and Egypt. “We try to make sure movement is smooth and safe,” continues Yalbas, “but that requires some arrangement with all concerned parties and authorities,” he adds. “Our role is to ensure the safety and the well being of displaced people and refugees, but we are facing some obstacles, including fear among refugees to show up because they are being targeted,” he says.

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1. €70 million for humanitarian activities including €10 million for Third Country Nationals repatriated in Chad and €10.5 million to co-finance EU Member states’ assets which supported the repatriation of Third Country Nationals to their country of origin.

■ A young woman, standing near the water gallons at Janzour port, near Tripoli



Protection of migrants a top priority

Samuel Chung, senior protection officer for UNHCR echoes the concern of fellow aid workers on the safety and vulnerability of migrants. "Migrants are living in terror, unable to move for fear of detention," he says. "Our priority for the moment is to ensure that the ones who are here, are kept in a safe position until the security situation is stable. Afterwards, we will pursue the normal procedure with refugees including settlement, local integration and voluntary return."

Several international groups are also joining relief efforts, including the Paris-based Médecins sans frontières and the Danish Refugee Council. Aid workers say they are appalled by the difficult living condition of sub-Saharan asylum seekers and express concern that a campaign of revenge could see many people killed or thrown in jail without legal grounds.

After taking a tour at a camping site for the African asylum seekers, Philippe Clerc, head of operations at the Danish Refugee Council says he is shocked to

witness the difficult living conditions of the migrants. "In this port alone, there are nearly 1,000 people who have been stranded for two months with no protection," he says. The fate of many sub-Saharan Africans people in Libya is unknown as the war rages, say aid workers. Many of these migrants breathe a sigh of relief when they see the blue colours of the UN and IOM at their camp site. But fear of an unknown future haunts them as the night falls and aid workers return to their headquarters. And some rebels go on the hunt to quench their thirst for vengeance.

European Commission Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

The mandate of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection Department (DG ECHO) is to provide emergency assistance and relief to the victims of natural disasters or armed conflict outside the European Union. The aid is intended to go directly to those in distress, irrespective of race, religion or political convictions.

ECHO's task is to ensure that goods and services get to crisis zones fast. Goods may include essential supplies, specific foodstuffs, medical equipment, medicines and fuel. Services may include medical teams, water purification teams and logistical support. Goods and services reach disaster areas via ECHO partners.

Since 1992, ECHO has funded humanitarian aid in crisis zones in more than 85 countries via its partners. Its grants cover emergency aid, food aid and aid to refugees and displaced persons worth a total of more than €700 million per year.

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ENPI Info Centre - 'What has the EU been doing to support the Libyan people?' >

http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=26082&id_type=1&lang_id=450

ECHO humanitarian aid to Libya > http://ec.europa.eu/echo/aid/north_africa_mid_east/libya_en.htm

EU External Action: Libya > http://eeas.europa.eu/libya/index_en.htm

Picture story: Lybia: Chadians fleeing home > http://ec.europa.eu/echo/aid/stories/picture_stories/libya03_en.htm