

Libya urged to end migrant detention amid warnings over threat to Mediterranean search and rescue

The head of UN Migration Agency ([IOM](#)), William Lacy Swing, has urged Libya to stop detaining migrants who have been returned to the country's shores after trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

That appeal coincided with a call from the UN Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#), to boost search and rescue facilities in the region, amid concerns about a toughening stance in some European Union (EU) countries, against volunteer boats disembarking people plucked from the water.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, IOM's Leonard Doyle explained that Ambassador Swing had made a personal appeal to Libya's Prime Minister, Fayez al-Sarraj.

On this third official visit since 2016 to the North African nation, which is a major migrant hub, Ambassador Swing also met some of those in detention.

"One after another, he heard absolutely awful personal stories of human grief in these detention centres," Doyle said. "His call, really, is not to send migrants back into detention."

Of more than 50 detention centres in operation last year in Libya, only 17 are still open, Mr Doyle explained, adding that the bulk of migration happened in and around Tripoli, where the internationally recognized Government is located.

Concerning the management of the detention centres, in which the UN Human Rights Office, OHCHR, has highlighted grave rights abuses in the past, Doyle said there is "government oversight" in some, "but it is far from comprehensive".

He added that when Ambassador Swing had met the Libyan Prime Minister, he had recommended the construction of separate centres for women and children.

The development follows a sharp increase in Libyan anti-smuggling operations in 2018, backed by the EU.

Last month alone, almost 4,000 people were rescued in the country's territorial waters, IOM said in a statement, noting with concern that migrants are placed in detention, often in overcrowded and poorly-monitored centres.



UNHCR/Vania Turner

Refugees on board an Italian Coast Guard ship, which rescued them after their boat capsized off the coast of Libya. Migrants and refugees undertake a perilous sea crossing aboard rickety boats with hopes of reaching Europe, unfortunately many lose their lives along the way. (file photo)

On the potential impact of the IOM chief's request, Mr Doyle noted that "we are already seeing vast improvements in many areas, the support with the coastguard is really impressive, despite occasional – from what we understand – rogue issues, there generally seems to be a desire by the coastguard personnel to save lives."

Alternatives to detention include "speeding up repatriation," the IOM spokesperson said. "So, we support them in voluntary repatriation, voluntary return, humanitarian return from Libya. It sometimes takes a while because they don't have papers and documents; the only embassies in the country really full-time are African embassies and even they have very low capacity."

Also in Geneva, UNHCR spokesperson Charlie Yaxley highlighted concern over the high number of vulnerable people who continue to perish in the Mediterranean Sea.

For the fifth year in a row, more than 1,000 people are dead or missing, he said, while nearly 48,000 asylum-seekers and migrants have reached Europe's shores in the first six months of 2018 – five times lower than in 2016, when arrivals peaked in the EU.

The high loss of life illustrates the need to strengthen search and rescue at sea, Mr Yaxley insisted, reiterating that the "key, key priority has to be saving lives at sea" and preventing people from "putting their lives in the hands of smugglers and taking these often-fatal journeys".

Between January and April, non-governmental organisations have been responsible for around 40 per cent of rescue operations for those disembarked

in Italy, UNHCR said in a statement.

And amid a recent decision by Italy to refuse docking rights to vessels carrying migrants, the agency reiterated the potentially fatal impact, if boats are discouraged from responding to distress calls.

“If we have any threats of legal action or the hint of repercussions of hanging over boats rescuing people at sea, then the very principle itself will potentially come under risk” Yaxley said. “You may see ship masters wavering over responding to distress calls and that is a dire situation not only for migrants and refugees, but for anyone who is in distress at sea,” he added.

[UN relief chief concludes disaster-preparedness mission to Haiti and Panama](#)

The top United Nations emergency relief official has assured the Haitian government of the organization’s support for its efforts to prepare against hurricanes and stamp out cholera.

Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, [completed](#) his first official mission to the Caribbean country and Panama, in Central America, on Friday.

“It was important for me to undertake this mission now – at the start of the hurricane season – to see for myself the Government-led and regional efforts to prepare for natural disasters,” Mr. Lowcock said about the three-day visit.

Haiti has been hit by successive natural disasters over the past decade and the UN relief chief met with people who are still struggling in their wake.

“After an earthquake, hurricanes, floods and recurring drought, Haitians’ remarkable resilience has been proven,” he declared. “But it is no surprise that after these successive blows and despite joint efforts of the Government and the international community, a very sizable number of Haitians still require assistance – not only to obtain life’s necessities, but also to build livelihoods and become more resilient to future threats,” he added.



UN OCHA/Nadia Todres

Mark Lowcock (left), Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator (UNOCHA), with Mamadou Diallo (2nd from left), Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) visit the Departmental Emergency Operations Center (COUD) Nord-Est in Fort Liberte, Haiti on 3 July 2018.

Mr. Lowcock travelled to several areas of the country. He visited a centre in the northeast, at the border with the Dominican Republic, where returnees and deportees receive assistance and protection services.

He also met people living with disabilities who receive assistance at a local organization where many of the staff are also persons with disabilities.

The UN official vowed to share their stories with the world, at the Global Disability Summit that will be held in London later this month.

In the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, Mr. Lowcock held talks with the authorities where he reiterated the UN's support for the Government's disaster preparedness efforts.

He praised the Government's commitment to meeting the needs of its most vulnerable citizens, including those who struggle to get enough to eat, and underlined the UN's commitment to support efforts to eradicate cholera.

However, he pointed out that the country needs more international support as a humanitarian response plan for this year, is less than 10 per cent funded.

In Panama, Mr. Lowcock met with top officials, including Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Isabel de Saint Malo de Alverado, to discuss the country's critical role in strengthening humanitarian action in the region.

He also met with regional development and humanitarian partners, and reiterated support for regional preparedness efforts.

Girls groomed for suicide missions fight back against the extremists of Lake Chad

Halima Yakoy Adam won't forget 22nd December in 2015, the day she was supposed to carry out a suicide bomb attack in the Lac Region town of Bol, 200 km north of N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, in Central Africa.

"It was market day in Bol and I was with two other girls who like me carried explosives," the young woman told UN News. "I was just 15 years old. I was given drugs and had been trained by the extremist Boko Haram terrorist group to be a suicide bomber."

The local authorities detected the three teenage girls and tried to arrest them, but the two other girls detonated their explosive vests, killing themselves and seriously wounding Halima Yakoy Adam. She survived but had both legs amputated below her knees.

Halima is one of the extraordinary young women, introduced to the United Nations [Deputy Secretary-General](#) in Chad on Thursday. UN News is accompanying her and other senior women from the world body, and the African Union, on a high-level visit that will include neighbouring Niger this weekend.

Boko Haram has been active in north-east Nigeria and the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger for several years. Its chief aim is to create an Islamist state in the north of Nigeria. Its campaign of terror has caused the displacement of some 10 million people as of 2017, and led to the widespread destruction of basic infrastructure, such as health and educational facilities, as well as agricultural land and machinery.

These groups manipulate and exploit inequality. It is for this reason that our efforts to prevent violent extremism need to prioritize gender equality. – *Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (UN Women)*

Coordination among the affected countries including through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has led to what the UN described last year as "encouraging progress in the fight against Boko Haram." But to compensate for that success, the group has changed its tactics, increasing the use of suicide attacks. In June and July 2017, the United Nations recorded some 130 attacks attributed to Boko Haram, leading to the deaths of 284 civilians in the four affected countries.

Raising Awareness

Speaking in Bol after talking to Halima, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told UN News: “This is one of many stories I have heard, as this is where I come from. I come from Nigeria. This is sadly the story of many girls; but unlike Halima many did not survive.”

Ms Mohammed praised the young woman’s resilience, adding: “I think there is more awareness of suicide bombing today than there was before. There is nothing more powerful than a victim who tells her story. Halima has moved from victim to survivor because she is using that experience to educate other girls.”

Although the incidence of suicide bombing appears to be increasing in Chad, it is a relatively new development for women to be involved, according to Clarisse Mehoudamadji Nailar from CELIAF, a Chadian association of women leaders.

“Extremism amongst women didn’t exist in the past in Chad. This seems to be a new phenomenon,” she said. “The Government is making a big effort to fight the extremists and meanwhile non-governmental organizations in Chad are trying to educate and sensitize women about the dangers of extremism.”

A joint United Nations-African Union mission has been in Chad for two days. The visit which also included the Foreign Minister of Sweden, Margot Wallström, has focused on the importance of women’s meaningful participation in promoting peace, security and development.

The Executive Director of the UN’s gender agency, [UN Women](#), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka- also part of the mission – said that groups like Boko Haram aim to manipulate young girls to carry out terrorist acts. “What is common to these terrorist groups is the subjugation of women and girls and a denial of their rights”, she told UN News.

“These groups manipulate and exploit inequality. It is for this reason that our efforts to prevent violent extremism need to prioritize gender equality.” She added that “Halima’s story epitomizes the relationship between the lack of power of women and terrorism – a young woman who had no choices over decisions relating to her own life.”

Back in Bol in Chad’s Lac Region, Halima has finished her training as a paralegal. Today she considers herself an agent change of who sensitizes “my sisters against radicalism and extreme violence,” she said adding: “I am happy to have a second chance in life and now I want to give back to my community.”

Forests ‘essential’ for the future, UN agriculture chief spells out in new report

Time is running out for the world’s forests, warns a new report by the United Nations agriculture agency, urging governments to foster an all-inclusive approach to benefit both trees and those who rely on them.

Halting deforestation, managing forests sustainably, restoring degraded forests and adding to worldwide tree cover all require actions to avoid potentially damaging consequences for the planet and its people, according to the State of the World’s Forests 2018, referred to as SOFO 2018.

Forests and trees contribute more to human livelihoods than most people know – playing crucial roles in food security, drinking water, renewable energy and rural economies.

Moreover, they provide income for some 20 per cent of rural households in developing countries as well as cooking and heating fuel for one-in-three people globally.

“Forests are critical to livelihoods” said José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO).

“Healthy and productive forests are essential to sustainable agriculture and we have proof of the significance of forests and trees for the quality of water, for contributing to the energy needs of the future, and for designing sustainable, healthy cities,” he added.

This year’s report documents the importance of forests for the [2030 Agenda](#) – ranging from tackling climate change to conserving biodiversity, reducing inequalities and improving urban habitats.

“Trees and forests contribute to achieving multiple targets across the 2030 Agenda and need to be incorporated into strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” said Eva Mueller, FAO Forestry Director.

This year’s report documents just how essential forests are for the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) – ranging from tackling climate change to assuring drinking water and improving urban habitats.

Forests are critical to livelihoods – José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General

SOFO 2018 emphasizes the importance of clear legal frameworks on forest tenure rights; applauds the growing trend in local governance; and calls for

effective partnerships to pursue sustainable goals.

Given that deforestation is the second leading cause of climate change, the report calls corporate responsibility for zero deforestation “key.”

Looking ahead

While there is much work to be done, the publication points to numerous examples that indicate growing awareness and a gradual increase in sustainable practices to preserve the world’s forests.

For example, more than half of paper is recycled today and by constructing wood panels from discarded materials, production has grown four-times faster than fresh timber requirements over the past two decades.

What’s more, one-in-five people globally count on non-wood forest products for food, income and nutritional diversity – the mainstays of human life – generating more than \$88 billion in income, according to SOFO 2018.

While many of the world’s major watersheds have lost tree cover, the report notes a worldwide increase over the past 25 years in forest areas now managed for soil and water conservation.

Further underscoring their value, wood fuel accounts for as much of the world’s renewable energy supply as solar, hydroelectric and wind power, and forests contain the equivalent of 142 billion tons of oil – roughly 10 times the annual global primary energy consumption.

SOFO 2018 has been released prior to the [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#), which will begin on 9 July in New York.

Fisherwomen of Lake Chad show optimism in face of multiple challenges

It’s eight o’clock in the morning and fifty-year-old Falmata Mboh Ali paddles her small dugout canoe to the shores of a tributary of Lake Chad in Bol, a small town 100 miles north of the capital of Chad, N’Djamena.

In her nets she has perhaps fifty fish, a good enough catch, given she started fishing just five hours earlier. But, it is not sufficient to feed her eleven children.

“I can sell this fish and use that money to buy grain to feed my family,” she said, “but the grain doesn’t go far. I have been fishing for twenty years and it is becoming more difficult to catch fish.”

Fishing has traditionally sustained communities in the Lake Chad Basin area, supporting nearly 30 million people living along its shores in Chad, but also Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger.

However, the once huge lake which covered 250,000 km² has now shrunk to one tenth of its original size, largely due to unsustainable water management and the corrosive effects of climate change.

With fish now more scarce, and fishermen needing to travel further to find them, the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) has stepped in to offer support.

“We have been helped by a project which has supplied new nets, so my catch is increasing,” said Falmata Mboh Ali, “so I am hopeful that my family’s life can improve.”

The precarious situation local people now find themselves in has been compounded by insecurity related to the activities of the Islamist Boko Haram terrorist group, across the whole Lake Chad region.

The insurgency the group has mounted in north-eastern Nigeria and neighbouring countries has displaced more than 2 million people and led to humanitarian crisis. The UN estimates that around four million people don’t have enough to eat.

And if more refugees flee into Chad from the conflict in the Central African Republic, the food and nutrition crisis is likely to worsen.

Perhaps not surprisingly the Lake Chad region is amongst the poorest in the world, where access to food, health services and education is extremely low.



UN News/Dan Dickinson

More women are involved in catching and preparing fish for sale in the Lake Chad Basin region of central Africa.

Fisherwomen including Falmata Mboh Ali, explained the challenges they face to a high-level joint United Nations-African Union delegation, visiting Bol on Thursday; a visit which also included the Foreign Minister of Sweden, Margot Wallström.

The African Union Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop who was part of the mission said: "The challenges are great but we can act. Gender roles are changing, women now go out to fish, when before it was men, so they are playing a bigger role in society."

The steps being taken by fisherwomen are small but significant, according to the UN [Deputy Secretary-General](#), Amina Mohammed, who is leading the delegation to Chad.

"Women's economic empowerment is a critical tool for their access to leadership and decision-making positions," she said. "I encourage the women to take part in all political, peace, security and development processes that will sustain their communities."

The UN and the wider international community is supporting efforts by countries in the Lake Chad Basin to regenerate the region.

Ultimately, it's hoped that Lake Chad itself could be given new life with rising water levels, allowing fisherfolk to carry out their traditional activities of years gone by, while providing them with a more secure and stable economic and political future.