

UN criticized as migrants die of disease in detention center

Author:

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CAIRO: In the desert of western Libya, hundreds of African migrants were held for months in a hangar filled with maggot-covered garbage and sewage. They shared a couple of buckets of water between them and barely survived on one meal a day. More than 20 died from disease and hunger, they said.

The migrants and their advocates accused UN aid agencies of turning a blind eye or responding too slowly to their plight.

The UN refugee agency, or UNHCR, denies it has been unresponsive, saying it has been unable to access parts of the facility, run by one of Libya's many militias. The commander in charge of the facility denied there was any lack of access.

Internal memos and emails leaked to The Associated Press also show disagreement among the UNHCR and other aid agencies over conditions at the site in the town of Zintan, with one NGO working on behalf of UNHCR denying there was lack of food, even as it acknowledged it had not been able to see the majority of migrants held there.

The suffering of the migrants held in Zintan underscores the impact of the EU's effective yet much-criticized policy of blocking Africans from sailing across the Mediterranean to its shores and keeping them in Libya.

Funded and trained by the EU, Libyan border guards have been stepping up efforts to stop migrants from crossing. As a result, thousands of migrants are trapped in a country thrown into chaos by war.

At least 6,000 are locked up in dozens of detention facilities run by militias accused of human rights abuses and torture. Others are held in traffickers' lockups, where they face torture and rape by traffickers seeking ransom money from their families, according to reports from the UN and rights groups.

EU officials say they have dedicated millions of dollars to providing humanitarian aid to migrants and helping them return home, through the UNHCR and other agencies.

The EU said in a statement that it is not ignoring what it described as the "dire" situation of refugees and migrants stranded in Libya. It said it has repeatedly denounced inhumane conditions in detention centers and demanded their closure.

Responding to questions from the AP, the EU said a joint task force with the African Union and the UN is seeking safer alternatives outside Libya, including by stepping up evacuations and legal resettlement. But little has

changed in Zintan.

Migrants inside the detention center who were contacted by the AP accused UNHCR of abandoning them.

“Migrants are appealing for your help to be a voice to the voiceless,” one told the AP, addressing UN agencies. “We need emergency evacuation from Zintan ... we suffer physically, mentally, and emotionally.”

Like others who spoke from the site, he asked not to be named to avoid reprisals from guards.

Around 700 Africans, most from Eritrea, are held at the facility. Until earlier this month, almost all were held in a hangar from which photos and video were posted online and drew media attention. Since then, the migrants say they were moved to two smaller halls, with similarly tough conditions.

While in the hangar, migrants said they were not allowed out to see the sun. Guards gave them one small plate of pasta or couscous a day. Each day, a few were given a few minutes to rush out to a faucet with a couple of buckets, fill them with water and bring them back for the others to drink.

Photos and videos taken by migrants showed heaps of garbage in the hangar, parts of which were flooded with sewage, and plates of food crawling with maggots. The hangar had only four toilets along with buckets that the detainees urinate in. The migrants said the head of the center would often deprive them of food and water for days as a form of punishment. Doctors Without Borders, an aid agency that did manage to visit the detention facility, said it found several malnourished migrants.

At least 22 migrants have died at the site since September, the migrants said. Those who died weren't buried because there is no cemetery for Christians, migrants inside the facility said. Instead the bodies were kept in air-conditioned rooms or refrigerators.

An individual with direct knowledge of the conditions at the facility said they were eventually buried. He also spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the press.

At least 100 others are sick with disease, mainly tuberculosis, migrants said.

“Our life is worse and terrible from day to day,” said one Eritrean migrant.

Libyan authorities say they have over 50 detention centers but it's not clear how many are actively used to house migrants. Some of the centers have been ordered shut down because of human rights violations. Many of them are known to be rife with torture and human rights abuses, according to UN and rights groups.

The Zintan facility has such a bad reputation that migrants in other detention centers caught in the crossfire of fighting between Libya's factions refuse to be sent there.

"They prefer to die under bombs and not go through the slow death in Zintan," said Giulia Tranchina, a human rights lawyer from the Britain-based Wilsons Solicitors who has been in direct contact with migrants trapped in Zintan and other places.

The manager of the facility is known for punishing migrants by shutting off access to electricity, water, and locking them up for a prolonged period of time, migrants said.

In May, the migrants rioted. About 30 managed to escape from the detention center. Five were caught and returned to the facility. The rest disappeared, migrants and aid officials said.

Julien Raickman of Libya's Doctors Without Borders called the Zintan facility a health disaster. "A tuberculosis outbreak has likely been raging for months in the detention center," he added.

Raickman believes migrants in the facility have been neglected because it's "away from the main effort by the humanitarian actors in and around Tripoli."

Activists and migrants said they have sent messages and emails to the UN and its partners for months about conditions at Zintan. After photos from inside the site emerged in June, the UNHCR intervened and evacuated 96 migrants from a separate building at the facility where it had access. They were sent to the one UN-run center for migrants in the country, in Tripoli.

UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi told the AP he disagrees "in the strongest terms" with the contention the agency has not been trying to help. He said it has been barred from entering some detention centers.

"It is not because of lack of will or not even because of lack of resources: Access in Libya is the fundamental obstacle to saving more lives," he said.

He said the agency is trying to gain access to the entire detention center at Zintan.

In principle, aid workers must negotiate with multiple rival militias to get into facilities, provide medicines and extract those it can to safety, he said.

Grandi said his agency has succeeded in sending 4,000 migrants to Niger to await resettlement, while the International Organization for Migration has helped some 35,000 return to their home countries.

"If we and IOM and other humanitarian organizations were not on the ground in Libya trying to help, even the few thousand people that we have managed to save – saving their lives literally – would have been exposed to almost certain death, abuse, torture and worse," he said.

He said other countries need to step forward to take in migrants for resettlement.

He criticized the EU, saying "it made a choice" to empower Libya's coast

guard to intercept migrants at sea and bring them back to Libya. "These people are returned back to one of the most dangerous places on Earth," he said.

Tarek Lamloom, head of the Libyan rights group Beladi, said he had made direct appeals for trapped migrants to the UN but had seen no action. "We are fully convinced that there is a great deal of negligence by the UNHCR toward what the migrants are going through," he said.

Libya became a major crossing point for migrants to Europe after the 2011 ouster and killing of longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi. The North African nation was thrown into chaos, armed militias proliferated, and central authority fell apart.

A weak, UN-aligned administration in Tripoli oversees the west, where Zintan is located, but much of its powers are in the hands of militias. Eastern Libya is controlled by a rival government aligned with the self-styled Libyan National Army led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who in April launched an offensive on Tripoli.

Col. Nasser Nakoua, who runs the detention center in Zintan, denied there was any lack of access to the facility.

"Those saying that they have no access are just lying. The doors are open and we want the agencies to come and help or just shut the place down, because there is severe shortage in everything," he told the AP by phone.

He blamed the government, which is nominally in control of the facility, for failing to fund its operations. "We received nothing from Department for Combating Illegal Migration," he said, referring to the body in charge of the facilities, "not a single penny."

He said the catering company contracted to deliver meals warned this month that it would stop delivering food if payments are not made. He said he is searching for a new company.

"I wrote many times to the DCIM and there is no response whatsoever," he said. "Problems of malnutrition and disease surged because of lack of funds and support."

He denied depriving the migrants of food or water, saying "these are humans at the end."

European funding of Libya's coast guard has dramatically reduced the perilous Mediterranean crossings. The number of people entering the EU via the central Mediterranean Sea route, most from Libya, was cut to 23,400 in 2018, down from 180,000 two years earlier.

In the first four months of this year, it was down another 91 percent from same period the year before, with 880 crossings, according to Frontex, the EU's border agency.

But that has left thousands stranded in detention centers.

Tranchina said that in one center in the coastal town of Zawiya, migrants who had endured beatings and torture by guards banged on doors and tried to break out. Guards opened fire, killing one and wounding others, she said.

The detention center at Zintan is made up of two parts – the hangar and a smaller building.

An official with International Medical Corps said it had established a clinic at the smaller building and was providing health care. He said reports of lack of food and water were untrue, though quality was poor, and that guards sometimes withheld water as punishment.

He acknowledged that his group could not get into the hangar where most of the migrants were held until last month, and that it was up to guards to bring out detainees for medical treatment.

An aid worker with Doctors Without Borders said he was able to visit the hangar at one point.

He said in an email that migrants told him it was the first time in seven months that guards had opened the doors. He said 60 women and six children under the age of 12 had been held there for a year and the half, confirmed at least 20 deaths and said and at least 60 sick migrants, most suffering from tuberculosis, were held in a single cell.

“I never saw people abandoned as much as in Zintan and Gharyan,” he said, referring to another center in a nearby town. “The level of despair of the detainees is beyond words.”



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UN agencies urge Italy to let migrants get off rescue boat
Libyan navy says it intercepted 91 Europe-bound migrants

[Former Turkish PM Davutoglu slams Erdogan's AKP after Istanbul defeat](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-06-30 21:32

ANKARA: A former Turkish prime minister and close ally of President Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday harshly criticised the ruling AK Party after a stinging electoral defeat in Istanbul last week that was widely seen as ominous for Erdogan at national level.

The AKP last week lost the mayor's post in Turkey's biggest city to the main opposition party for the first time in 25 years by a hefty margin, having forced a re-run following an earlier narrow defeat.

Ahmet Davutoglu, who served as prime minister between 2014 and 2016 before falling out with Erdogan, has criticised the president and his policies before.

But his latest comments come as former deputy prime minister Ali Babacan and former president Abdullah Gul, both founding members of the AKP, plan to launch a new rival party this year.

"There used to be a government that realised all its pledges over time," Davutoglu said at an event in the province of Elazig, adding that those who caused a "slide" in the party's principles should "pay the price".

"If we lose an election that we first lost by 13,000 votes again by 800,000 votes, as was the case in Istanbul, the one responsible for this is not a prime minister who delivered a clear parliamentary majority (in last year's general election), but rather those who have caused a serious slide in rhetoric, actions, morals and politics."

During the Istanbul campaign, Erdogan accused the opposition of links to terrorism and highlighted a call by Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan, jailed on the island prison of Imrali, for a pro-Kurdish party to remain neutral.

Davutoglu was dismissive:

"Saying the elections are valid even if (won) by one vote and then changing your stance; talking about a matter of survival in one election and labelling anyone who thinks otherwise a terrorist but then getting in touch with Imrali in the next vote is a detachment from the public conscience."

Voters appeared to be blaming the AKP for a recession that wiped 30% off the

lira's value last year and another 10% this year.

"We are facing economic problems as we did in 2008. Then, there were people at the helm of the economy who understood economy. There was vision," Davutoglu said.

"We cannot get out of this crisis with the mentality of knowing best for everything, belittling, and thinking teamwork is just bringing together your inner circle."

Last year, after winning sweeping powers under a new executive presidential system that Davutoglu called "distorted", Erdogan made his son-in-law Berat Albayrak finance minister.

"The AKP is not the party of one person, one family or one group alone," Davutoglu said. "State structure and family ties must absolutely be separated. There must be no first-degree relatives."

Davutoglu had been rumoured to be joining the breakaway party. Last week, a source close to him said he was planning a 'new step', but did not plan to join Gul and Babacan for now.

Instead, he issued what appeared to be a rallying cry to Erdogan's critics within the AKP.

"Today is not the time to be silent. It is not the time to keep the truths we discuss behind closed doors silent in front of the open doors too," he said. "We need a new understanding of politics."



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Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu hails victory as step to repair

[Killing of Palestinian triggers protests in Issawiya](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-06-29 23:48

JERUSALEM: Palestinians in Issawiya, East Jerusalem have continued protests for the third day running after Israeli soldiers killed 20-year-old Mohammad Obeid on Thursday.

Witnesses said that the soldiers killed Obeid even though their lives were not in danger. Israeli officials admitted that Obeid was shot by Israeli soldiers but claimed that they were at risk after fireworks were launched at them at close range. Israeli forces later retrieved Obeid's body from a car heading to the nearby Maqassed hospital.

An Israeli court refused to immediately return the body but said that police must do so within 24 hours.

Ahmad Budeiri, a reporter following the events, told Arab News that the court ordered the body be given back on condition the family agreed that only four people would attend the funeral or they would be fined 20,000 shekels (\$5,000). The family has refused.

"If the issue of the return of the body is not reached this could quickly escalate," Buderer said.

Talal Abu Afifeh, head of the Jerusalem Intellectual Forum, told Arab News that the protests that led to Obeid's killing were in opposition to the US-led "Peace to Prosperity" plan.

"Protests in Issawiya were against the Bahrain economic workshop and have escalated since," he said. Abu Afifeh, who lives in the nearby Shufat refugee camp, said: "People in the Shufat refugee camp, Sur Baher and Qalandia have protested continuously since Thursday," he said.

Obeid's mother said that her son had been arrested a number of times by Israeli police.

Residents of Issawiya have been subjected to regular raids and arrests by the Israeli army and police for years, with homes in the town often demolished.

The main entrance to the town was historically near the Hebrew University, but it was shut by Israeli authorities during the Second Intifada of 2000-2005. Now, only pedestrians can enter through the route.

Residents of Issawiya complain that they are discriminated against in favor of the nearby Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, which is expanding.



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Palestinian shot dead by Israel police in Jerusalem 'We have not seen any political plan for peace, stand with Palestinians': Bahrain FM

[**Erdogan: US will not impose sanctions over Russian missile deal**](#)

Sat, 2019-06-29 22:23

OSAKA, ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday the United States did not plan to impose sanctions on Ankara for buying Russian defence systems, after the U.S. president said Turkey had not been treated fairly over the contract.

The NATO allies have been at odds over Turkey's decision to procure the Russian S-400 missile defence systems, with Washington warning of sanctions

if the deal goes through.

Russia's Interfax agency on Saturday quoted a Kremlin spokesman as saying that the deal envisaged a partial handover of technology.

Turkey has said it would not back down before the early July delivery date, further testing relations that are already strained over a host of other issues.

But in contrast to statements by U.S. officials, Donald Trump said Turkey had been treated unfairly over its decision to buy the S-400s and blamed the "mess" on the administration of former President Barack Obama. Trump did not rule out sanctions.

Speaking shortly after bilateral talks with Trump at the G20 summit in Japan, Erdogan said that the S-400s would be delivered in the first half of July, adding he had heard directly from Trump that there would be no sanctions.

"We have heard from him personally that this would not happen," Erdogan said. "We are strategic partners with the United States. As strategic partners, nobody has the right to meddle in Turkey's sovereign rights. Everyone should know this."

Earlier, asked if the United States would impose sanctions on Turkey, Trump, sitting alongside Erdogan, said the issue was being discussed, but it was a "two-way street" and both sides were evaluating "different solutions".

The United States says the S-400s are not compatible with NATO's defence network and could compromise its Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth fighter jets, an aircraft Turkey is helping to build and planning to buy.

Under possible U.S. sanctions, Turkey could face expulsion from the F-35 programme, a move Erdogan has dismissed. But Washington has already started the process of removing Turkey from the F-35 programme, halting training of Turkish pilots in the United States on the aircraft.

"We have a payment so far of \$1.4 billion to the United States," Erdogan said. "As joint producers, until now four F-35 jets have been delivered to us, but we will still receive... a total of 116 jets. We are expecting these," he added.

"What some people in lower ranks are saying absolutely do not align with Mr Trump's approach. I believe these will not harm our bilateral ties, and that is the commitment we are going on with."

'UNFAIR' TREATMENT

Despite the threat of sanctions, Turkey had put its hopes on the relationship between Erdogan and Trump, saying it expected the U.S. president to protect it from sanctions over the S-400 deal.

Ahead of Saturday's talks, the meeting between Erdogan and Trump was seen as Turkey's last push to avoid U.S. sanctions that could significantly damage its already ailing economy.

Even minor U.S. sanctions could prompt another sharp sell-off in the Turkish lira. A 30% slide in the currency drove the economy into recession last year, and the lira has lost another 10 percent this year.

Erdogan's comments also appeared to go beyond statements made by the Turkish presidency and the White House after the talks between the two leaders, which lasted around 40 minutes.

The White House said Trump "expressed concern" over the S-400 deal and "encouraged Turkey to work with the United States on defence cooperation in a way that strengthens the NATO alliance", while the Turkish presidency said Trump had voiced a desire to resolve the dispute without harming bilateral

ties.

In an effort to sway Turkey, the United States has offered to supply it with Raytheon Co Patriot missiles, but Erdogan has said the U.S. offer was not as good as Russia's S-400 proposal.

Speaking at a news conference at the G20 minutes before Erdogan, Trump blamed Barack Obama's administration for placing conditions on Turkey's purchase of Patriot missiles and treating Turkey unfairly, and added Erdogan had no fault in the dispute.

"This administration previous to mine would not let him buy it (Patriots). So (Erdogan) goes out, he goes to Russia, and makes a deal for the S-400," Trump said. "He made a deal, he paid them a lot of money, put up a lot of money. And he bought it."

"As soon as he bought it (S-400), people went back to him from our country and they said, 'Listen, we don't want you to use that system because it's not the NATO system,'" he added. "He got treated very unfairly."

Trump also said he would visit Turkey, but added that a date had not been set yet. Erdogan said earlier this week that Trump may visit in July.



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Turkey unafraid of US sanctions over S-400 deal: Foreign minister Turkey, US in diplomatic crisis after ministers hit by sanctions

Algerians brave heavy police presence to demand transition

Author:

Sat, 2019-06-29 21:42

ALGIERS: Protesters thronged the heart of Algeria's capital on Friday despite a heavy police presence, vowing to push their demands for transition after the ouster of president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Under a scorching sun, massive crowds marched through the streets of Algiers all afternoon in the 19th consecutive week of mass protests against the North African country's regime.

Some 100 police vans – many more than normal – were deployed in Algiers from early morning, along with water canon and bulldozers.

Ahmed, a 54-year-old protester, said he had never seen such a heavy police presence.

"They want to scare us, but they're wrong – fear is behind us," he told AFP. The vehicles remained in place throughout the rally.

Police particularly targeted protesters carrying the Berber flag, after army chief and key power broker Ahmed Gaid Salah banned all flags other than the national colours at rallies.

Algeria's Berber minority has long suffered marginalisation.

After arresting one man carrying the flag, police fired tear gas to cover their retreat, provoking anger among the protesters, who were quickly calmed by volunteers determined to ensure demonstrations remain peaceful.

The rally in Algiers – and some 31 of the country's 48 regions – dispersed without major incidents in the late afternoon, the official APS news agency said.

Demonstrations were planned for Friday night in six sub-Saharan regions of Algeria.

Mass protests sparked by ailing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's intention to stand for a fifth term led to his resignation on April 2.

But the demonstrations have carried on, with demonstrators demanding the departure of regime insiders and the establishment of independent institutions.

The country's constitutional council was forced to cancel polls set for next week to select Bouteflika's successor, after the only two candidates – both little known – were rejected.

Protesters have demanded the establishment of transitional bodies, free of Bouteflika-era officials, to push through reforms ahead of presidential elections.

Army chief Gaid Salah, who has resisted such moves, has also faced persistent calls to resign.

Former prime ministers Abdelmalek Sellal and Ahmed Ouyahia are among several high profile figures detained under a probe into corruption under Bouteflika's rule.

But some in the opposition say such probes should be the responsibility of a

future government, fearing that regime factions could use them to settle scores against each other.



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Algerian protesters hold demonstrations despite arrests
Algerians rally even after ex-premiers detained