

Critics: Greece criminalizes migration, prosecutes helpers

Author:

AP

ID:

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Tue, 2021-11-16 00:12

CHIOS, Greece: Among the prison inmates of the Greek island of Chios, three young men from Afghanistan and Somalia are serving dramatically long sentences: 50 years for two of them, a staggering 142 for the third. But these are not violent criminals, even according to their trial verdicts. They were convicted for steering inflatable dinghies carrying them and other migrants after they say smugglers abandoned them in the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece.

"I didn't think saving people is a crime," said Hanad Abdi Mohammad, 28, a soft-spoken Somali charged as a smuggler after arriving in Greece last December and sentenced to 142 years.

Mohammad told journalists and European Parliament lawmakers visiting the three in prison last week that he had no choice but to drive the boat. The smuggler forced him to take over, hitting him in the face and threatening him with a gun before abandoning the dinghy in rough seas.

Critics say the men's cases, as well as prosecutions or threats of criminal proceedings against aid workers, illustrate the expanding arsenal of techniques authorities in Greece and other countries are using to deter asylum-seekers.

"It's not possible that someone who comes to claim asylum in Greece is threatened with such heavy sentences simply because they were forced, by circumstances or pressure, to take over handling a boat," said Alexandros Georgoulis, one of the lawyers representing the three imprisoned in Chios. Greek authorities, he said, "are essentially baptizing the smuggled as the smuggler."

Mohammad's journey is also a stark indication of the chaos asylum-seekers may experience as they migrate between two countries long divided by deep-seated mistrust.

Fearing for their lives after the smuggler fled, the nearly three dozen panicked passengers abandoned their quest to reach Greece. Mohammad says he called the Turkish coast guard repeatedly, begging for a rescue. But when it arrived, the Turkish patrol boat circled the migrants' vessel sharply, sending water into the dinghy and gradually pushing it toward Greece. In the chaos, two women fell overboard and drowned.

The Greek coast guard rescued the survivors, and Mohammad helped other passengers onto the rescue boat. He admitted to having driven the boat after the smuggler left. It didn't cross his mind that would lead to him being prosecuted as a smuggler.

Aid workers and volunteers have also found themselves in the crosshairs of Greek authorities. In one widely publicized case, Syrian human rights worker Sarah Mardini, a refugee herself, and volunteer Sean Binder were arrested and

detained for months in 2018 on suspicion of espionage, money laundering and a litany of other offenses. They deny all charges, and say they were doing nothing more than helping rescue people.

It's not just Greece. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Germany, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain and Greece have initiated 58 investigations and legal proceedings since 2016 against private entities involved in search and rescue.

"I think it's important to challenge these in the courts, to not at all sit back and accept that we should be cast as smugglers or spies because I offered CPR, (or) more often than not just a smile, to someone in distress," Binder told the AP. "It is preposterous that we should be cast as criminals. I don't accept it...It doesn't matter who you are, you don't deserve to drown in the sea."



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[Sudan doctors say 2 more protesters](#)

die from gunshot wounds

Author:

AP

ID:

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Mon, 2021-11-15 23:31

KHARTOUM: Two more Sudanese protesters died in the hospital from wounds after being shot during mass protests against last month's military coup, a doctors union said on Monday.

That raises the death toll from Saturday's protests to seven, all but one from gunshots, the Sudan Doctors Committee said.

More than 200 others were wounded when security forces used live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protesters in the capital city of Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, the committee said.

Sudanese police denied using live ammunition, saying its forces only resorted to tear gas to disperse demonstrators allegedly attacking police stations and vehicles.

They said at least 39 policemen were wounded in Saturday's clashes.

Thousands of protesters took to the streets across Sudan on Saturday to rally against the military's takeover last month.

The Oct. 25 takeover upended a fragile planned transition to democratic rule, more than two years after a popular uprising forced the removal of Omar Bashir and his government.

The coup has drawn international criticism and massive protests in the streets of the capital of Khartoum and elsewhere in the country. At least 23 protesters were killed since Oct. 25, according to the doctors committee. The committee said the new deaths include 13-year-old Remaaz Hatim Al-Atta, who was shot in the head in front of her family's home in Khartoum, and Omar Adam who was shot in his neck during protests also in Khartoum. Both were shot on Oct. 25 and pronounced dead in the past 24 hours, it said.

Saturday's demonstrations came as the military has tightened its grip on power, appointing a new Sovereign Council.

The council, chaired by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, held its first meeting on Sunday, and said in a statement that a civilian government would be formed in the coming days.

Cracks, meanwhile, started to surface among the anti-coup movement over a call by a group of political parties and movements to return to the pre-coup power-sharing deal between the protesters and the generals.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association, which spearheaded the uprising against Bashir, criticized the call, insisting on handing power over to civilians.

The SPA said it would work with the Resistance Committees and other groups to topple the military council and establish a civilian government to lead the transition to democracy.



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Al-Jazeera says bureau chief detained by Sudanese forces
West says new Sudan army-led council breaches democracy transition

[North African climate change threatens farming, political stability](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1637007698831936100

Mon, 2021-11-15 23:18

SIDI SALEM, Tunisia: Tunisian olive farmer Ali Fileli looked out over his parched fields and crushed a lump of dry, dusty earth in his hand.

"I can't do anything with my land because of the lack of water," he said.

Fileli is just one of many farmers who have been left high and dry by increasingly long and intense droughts across North Africa.

"When I started farming with my father, there was always rain, or we'd dig a

well and there would be water," said the 54-year-old, who farms around 22 hectares of land near the northern city of Kairouan.

"But these last 10 years there has always been a lack of water. Every year the water table drops three to four meters."

Fileli showed AFP his sprawling orchard of olive trees. With the olive harvest approaching, some bore small, shriveled fruits, but the rest were dead.

He said that over the past decade, around half of his 1,000 olive trees have died due to drought.

The country's water crisis is clearly visible at the Sidi Salem reservoir, which supplies water to almost 3 million Tunisians, including the capital Tunis.

Years of drought have left its water level critically low, an ominous sign for the region's future.

The surface of the lake lies 15 meters below a high-water mark left by floods in 2018. Engineer Cherif Guesmi says that he has seen "terrifying climate change" during a decade working at the dam.

"The situation today is really critical," he said.

"There's hardly been any rain since a 2018 flood, and we're still using that water today."

As Tunisia sweltered in record temperatures topping 48 degrees Centigrade (118 Fahrenheit) in August, the reservoir lost 200,000 cubic meters per day from evaporation alone, he said.

Despite heavy rain in late October, little fell in the dam's catchment area and the reservoir remains at just 17 percent of capacity, according to official figures this week.

Tunisia's neighbors face similar challenges. The North African nations of Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia are among the 30 most water-stressed countries in the world, according to the World Resources Institute.

Experts warn this could drive social change that is likely to upset the region's tenuous sociopolitical balances.

Fileli has also had to delay plans to sow winter wheat or barley in his fields.

He lists the knock-on effects: Smaller crops mean farmers fall deeper into debt and hire fewer seasonal workers, adding to an 18 percent unemployment rate which has pushed many to leave the country.

"My son is saying, 'Dad, should I go and find work in Tunis or somewhere else? If things stay like this I have no future here'."

The problems facing Tunisia are felt across the region.

"The water table across North Africa is dropping due to a combination of over-pumping and lack of precipitation," said Aaron Wolf, a professor of geography at Oregon State University.

He cited Libya's massive Man Made River, a huge system built under the late dictator Muammar Qaddafi, to pump "fossil water" from finite aquifers in the southern desert to the country's coastal cities.

In Algeria – the scene of huge forest fires in August – valuable drinking water is regularly used for irrigation and industry.

And in Morocco, drought has "strongly affected agricultural production," according to the economy ministry.

Rabat's Agriculture Minister Mohammed Sadiki has told parliament that rainfall is down 84 percent from last year.

Wolf said the implications of drought go far beyond the countryside, causing migration within and across national borders.

“It’s in all parties’ interests to solve rural water problems,” he said. “Drought drives all the things that lead to political instability: rural people migrating to the city, where there is no support for them, exacerbating political tensions.”

Hamadi Habaieb, head of water planning at Tunisia’s environment ministry, said a combination of less rainfall and a growing population would mean that by 2050, the country would have “far less” water available per person.

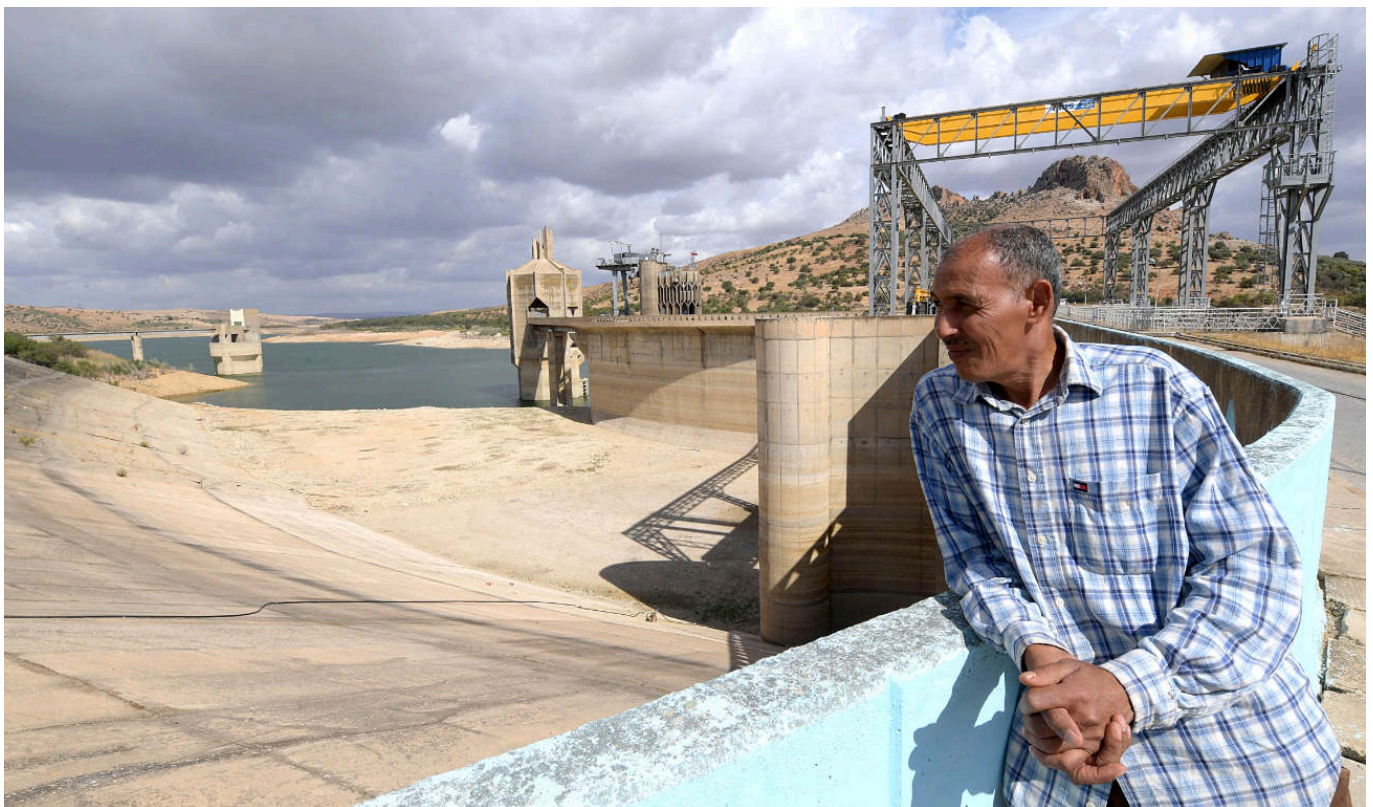
“Tunisia needs to adapt,” he said.

But he insisted that “farming has a future in Tunisia, although we will need to move toward very specific crops ... that can deal with a lack of water and to climate change.”

For Fileli, any solution may come too late to save his business – and the farming career of his son, aged 20.

“I’m thinking of giving up, going to the capital, somewhere else,” said Fileli.

“As long as there’s no water, no rain, why stay here? At least my children could find another future.”



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Water is key to Egyptian national security, says El-Sisi
Iraq calls for ‘fair’ steps to fight climate change

US military hid airstrikes that killed dozens of civilians in Syria

Mon, 2021-11-15 01:21

ROME: The US military covered up 2019 airstrikes in Syria that killed up to 64 women and children, a possible war crime, during the battle against Daesh, the New York Times reported on Saturday.

The two back-to-back airstrikes near the town of Baghuz were ordered by a classified American special operations unit tasked with ground operations in Syria, according to the report. The newspaper said that US Central Command, which oversaw US air operations in Syria, acknowledged the strikes for the first time this week and said they were justified.

In a statement on Saturday, Central Command reiterated the account it gave the newspaper that 80 people were killed in the strikes including 16 Daesh fighters and four civilians. The military said it was unclear if the other 60 people were civilians, partly because women and children could have been combatants.

In Saturday's statement, the military said the strikes were "legitimate self-defense," proportional and that "appropriate steps were taken to rule out the presence of civilians."

"We abhor the loss of innocent life and take all possible measures to prevent them. In this case, we self-reported and investigated the strike according to our own evidence and take full responsibility for the unintended loss of life," Central Command said.

The number of civilians among the 60 fatalities could not be determined because "multiple armed women and at least one armed child were observed" in video of the events, it said, adding that the majority of the 60 were likely combatants. Central Command said the strikes took place while Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were under heavy fire and in danger of being overrun and the SDF had reported the area clear of civilians.

The Defense Department's inspector general launched an inquiry into the March 18, 2019, incident, but its report was ultimately "stripped" of any mention of the bombing and a thorough, independent probe never took place, according to the Times.

The newspaper said its report was based on confidential documents and descriptions of classified reports, as well as interviews with personnel directly involved.

An Air Force lawyer present in the operations center at the time believed the strikes were possible war crimes and later alerted the Defense Department's inspector general and the Senate Armed Services Committee when no action was taken, the Times said.



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UAE, Syria to build PV power plant of 300MW in Damascus countryside:
SANATurkey bans Syrians, Iraqis and Yemenis from flights to Belarus

[Muslim World League launches exhibition on prophets' lives at Expo 2020 Dubai](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-11-14 19:00

DUBAI: The Muslim World League has launched an exhibition on the lives of the prophets at its Expo 2020 Dubai pavilion.

“The Prophets As If You See Them” uses the latest technology to present the biographies of Islam’s prophets and messengers.

It sheds light on the messages of peace, love, affection, tolerance, coexistence, and humanity that they brought to the world.

It also highlights the noble morals of Prophet Muhammad and the

comprehensiveness and beauty of Islam's global message.

The 25 prophets and messengers mentioned in the Qur'an will be introduced in five different languages: Arabic, English, French, Hebrew, and Indonesian.

Visitors can learn about the prophets' titles, nicknames, characteristics, morals, childhoods, relatives, the books that were revealed to them, the miracles they performed, and the languages they spoke.

The exhibition employs digital technology in different languages to transport visitors to another world, providing a cinematic experience enhanced by LED screens that take visitors to the heart of the action, as if they were accompanying the prophets through their lives.

It includes a campaign called "Islam is a Religion of Peace" and focuses on the humanitarian behavior of the prophets, especially Prophet Muhammad.

An interactive LED wall – "Your Message to Humanity" – is aimed at removing racial divides, overcoming negative cultural conflicts, and deepening the concept of people's right to live in dignity and freedom, emphasizing the importance of coexistence.

Visitors can leave a video message that will be part of an interactive mural. It will bear the signatures of visitors and messages of love, tolerance, and acceptance of others.

The second floor of the MWL pavilion contains models of Makkah and Madinah, among other exhibits.





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Muslim World League, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change sign deal to empower 100,000 young people