

UN agency to fly 15,000 migrants home from Libya in wake of reported abuses

1 December 2017 – The United Nations migration agency plans to fly 15,000 more migrants home from detention centres in Libya before year-end in the wake of shocking reports of rampant migrant abuse and squalid and overcrowded conditions at these facilities across the North African country.

“Scaling up our return programme may not serve to fully address [the plight of migrants](#) in Libya, but it is our duty to take migrants out of detention centers as a matter of absolute priority,” said William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) at its Council meeting in Geneva on Thursday.

IOM’s voluntary humanitarian return programme has brought more than 14,007 migrants back their home countries so far in 2017, a significant increase from the 2,775 voluntary returns carried out in 2016. A large-scale airlift already underway will take an additional 15,000 migrants home from detention in Libya by year-end, the agency said.

Libya in recent weeks has witnessed a drastic increase in the numbers of migrants held in detention centres – from a usual range of 5,000 to 6,000 to over 15,000, as migrants have been transferred from unofficial detention centres in Sabratha. Migrants face smuggling and mistreatment during their journey on the central Mediterranean route, which claimed 2,803 migrant lives to drowning this year alone.

To date, IOM has registered more than 400,000 migrants in Libya, with the total number of migrants in the country estimated to be more than 700,000 to one million.

The scaling up of the assistance will also include migrants wishing to go back home but are not in detention centres.

Earlier this week, the African Union, the European Union and the Libyan Government agreed to alleviate the plight of thousands of migrants trapped in Libya. IOM to fully support this initiative.

The establishment of a planned joint task force with all concerned parties is aimed at ensuring that the migration crisis in Libya is dealt with in a coordinated way.

For the returns to be sustainable, IOM is also scaling up its reintegration support for the migrants in countries of origin and will be working on addressing the root causes of migration, as well as increasing our programming to counter smuggling and human trafficking in the migration routes. IOM is appealing for further support to enhance such an approach.

“We are conscious that return alone is not sufficient to address the situation of migrants in Libya, and therefore we are also committed to

expanding our advocacy and capacity building efforts in order to introduce new approaches to migration management in Libya, in close cooperation with the Government of Libya and partners in the UN," Othman Belbeisi, IOM's Chief of Mission in Libya.

The majority of migrants asking to join IOM's voluntary return programme are Sub-Saharan Africans, including 4,316 originating from Nigeria, 1,588 from Guinea, 1,351 from Gambia, 1,305 from Mali and 973 from Senegal.