

Tunisia: Refugees Fleeing Libya Still Seeking A Safe Place to Go

Press Release: Doctors without Borders (26.05.)

[Doctors without Borders](#)

BEN GARDANE/GENEVA, May 25, 2011 – In the midst of escalating violence in a refugee camp on the Tunisia-Libya border, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today expressed alarm over the deteriorating living conditions encountered by refugees stranded in temporary camps and exposed to violence.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees have passed through Shousha camp since the start of the Libyan conflict, but some 4,000 people—mainly sub-Saharan Africans—cannot be repatriated due to the situation in their country of origin and thus face an highly uncertain future.

“Over the last days, we have seen a progressive escalation of violence, with ongoing incidents between groups of refugees of different nationalities,” said Mike Bates, MSF’s head of mission. “They are stuck in the camp—which was built as a temporary and transitional area—for an indefinite duration of stay. Most feel they are in a deadlock situation, with no future in sight.”

On Sunday May 22, four refugees died and 20 tents were destroyed when a fire of unknown origin spread through the camp at night. As tensions continued to rise, there was further violence between refugees of different nationalities living in the camp. Local residents were also involved. The situation escalated on Tuesday May 24, when at least two people died, many others were injured, and 300 to 400 tents burned down.

Since early March, MSF has been running a mental health program for people who have fled the conflict in Libya, providing more than 9,000 mental health consultations. Many people have had traumatic experiences, either witnessing or directly experiencing violence in the course of their escape from Libya. In addition, thousands of sub-Saharan African refugees are survivors of persecution and ill-treatment that took place in Libya prior to the conflict.

The conflict in Libya has put these people in further life-threatening danger. Since the conflict began, 800,000 people—mainly non Libyans—have fled the country, the majority towards Egypt and Tunisia. Thousands have risked their lives by fleeing north across the Mediterranean to Europe; more than 11,000 have reached the Italian island of Lampedusa. Another 60,000 fled south through the desert to Niger and beyond.

In an open letter on May 19, MSF alerted the leaders of the European states involved in the war in Libya to the dire situation faced by migrants fleeing the conflict towards Europe, and criticized inconsistent European migration policies.

“The latest developments in Shousha camp illustrate the absence of safe options for people fleeing Libya, particularly sub-Saharan nationals, whose journeys in search of a better living are like a never-ending nightmare,” said Bates.

MSF has been assisting the victims of the Libyan conflict since February, with medical teams working in Libya (Misrata, Benghazi and Zintan); along the Tunisia-Libya border; Italy (Lampedusa); and in Niger. Every day MSF staff are witness to the impact of the conflict on civilians.