

Open escape routes, take in refugees!

Appeal: Voices from Choucha (2011)

The appeal can be signed online [here](#)

A video about the situation can be watched [here](#)

“We want to leave! Europe must help!” The demands on the cardboard signs of refugees and migrants at the Tunisian-Libyan border are clear – and compelling: 5000 people have been waiting for weeks and months in unbearable conditions in the camp of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Choucha. All of them managed to escape the escalating civil war in Libya. Many were employed as migrant workers, others had sought refuge from the war and crisis zones in Sub-Saharan-Africa. Survivors of capsized refugee boats meet in Choucha those who, arising out of despair and despite all dangers, are setting off for the road back towards the Libyan border to risk the dangerous crossing to Europe. On the 5th of May 2011, when four refugees from Eritrea died at a fire in the improvised tent city, there were spontaneous protests and road blockades. The Tunisian Military responded with tear gas, residents attacked the camp. At least two refugees were killed, many were badly injured.

The refugees in Choucha were and still are hoping for help and support from the UNHCR, which had requested the European countries, among others, several times during the recent weeks with the intake of at least 6,000 refugees from Libya. In vain. Rather, the European border agency Frontex is given more and more contracts and the new democratic governments in Northern Africa are lured with offers of money, so they continue to be the watchdogs on the southern rim of European borders.

The situation in Choucha must be seen in the context of the forward externalisation of the European border regime to Northern Africa. In the defense of refugees and migrants, the European countries have shamelessly worked together for years with the despots of the Maghreb, especially with Ben Ali in Tunisia and Qaddafi in Libya. Now, indeed, the democratic transition is welcomed, but help is refused to all those who are stranded in the Tunisian refugee camps and for whom there is no return.

The voices of Choucha stand for the desperate protest against a policy of flagrant human rights violations, as they take place every day in many hot spots of Europe's external borders. A break with this policy is necessary to stop the dying at sea and in the desert. The democracy movements in Northern Africa provide the opportunity for a fresh start. Instead of fatal exclusion and grotesque threat scenarios, openness and solidarity must shape the future of the Mediterranean area. It needs bridges instead of walls for a new African-European relationship in order that Europe becomes a place of real freedom, general security and equal rights for All.

The acceptance of refugees from Choucha in Europe would, in this sense, set a first, not just symbolic character. We therefore call on the responsible policymakers at the European level, in the federal government, states and municipalities,

- to take emergency aid measures and take in the refugees from Choucha and other temporary refugee camps in Europe.
- to provide humanitarian support for Subsaharan migrants, who were already flown out from Libya or Tunisia. For example just in Mali over 10,000 refugees have arrived since the beginning of the war in Libya.

- to give up the existing deportation policies at the external borders in favor of a humane and generous asylum and immigration policy that is consistent with the rights of refugees and migrants.
- to support the democratic upheavals in Northern Africa seriously and to understand it as an opportunity for a changing neighbourhood policy.

Pro Asyl, Medico International, Borderline Europe, Afrique-Europe Interact, Welcome to Europe
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