



## Refugees on Tunisian-Libyan border: EP delegation calls for rapid action

Committees: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

**The EU Member States should do more to help in the resettlement of refugees from war-torn countries who are in camps in the Tunisian-Libyan border and cannot return to their homes, said a European Parliament delegation who visited Tunisia from 13 to 16 July 2011. The delegation called on the Home Affairs Ministers to discuss this issue during the informal Council meeting on the 18 and 19 July, in Poland. The EU cannot turn a blind eye to the dramatic realities in these refugee camps, MEPs say.**

A European Parliament delegation visited two refugee camps on Thursday at the Tunisian-Libyan border. Shousha, the biggest refugee camp, situated 7 km from the border, currently hosts over 3.700 people from 22 different countries, including Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan. The other camp, run by the United Arab Emirates, provides shelter for 740 people.

Parliament's ad hoc delegation was headed by Simon Busuttil (EPP, Malta) and composed of Claude Moraes (S&D, UK), Judith Sargentini (Greens/EFA, The Netherlands), Agustín Díaz de Mera (EPP, Spain), Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE, France) and Sylvie Guillaume (S&D, France).

The delegation met with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other humanitarian and relief organisations, and spoke directly to some of the refugees and their community leaders. They also met with the Tunisian Prime Minister and several Ministers on Friday.

Following the visits to the refugee camps, MEPs in the delegation stated:

"This visit has been truly eye-opening. We were struck by the very harsh conditions people are facing, especially due to the extreme heat, sandstorms and limited access to clean water and adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities. This presents particular hardships for children and pregnant women.

We were also struck by the overwhelming hospitality and solidarity of the Tunisian people keeping an open door policy to third country nationals who fled Libya.

This is a lesson for EU Member States. We are disappointed with the weak response given by Member States compared to the efforts undertaken by countries like Norway, the United States and Canada. The EU should do more to help in the resettlement of refugees from war-torn countries who cannot return to their homes. We urge them to commit to the proposed resettlement programme, including the emergency mechanism.

We call on the Home Affairs Ministers to discuss this issue during the informal JHA Council meeting on the 18th and 19th July, in Poland. Europe must address the challenges posed by this situation, particularly the treatment of refugees and humanitarian aid as well as the impact on migration towards Europe. The EU cannot turn a blind eye to these dramatic realities.

This is an international problem that requires an international response. Tunisia has just undergone its own revolution and faces sizable economic and social difficulties, especially given the unprecedented levels of unemployment among young people. The migration flows represent a further burden that ought to be shared".

# Press release

*Signed: Simon Busuttil, Claude Moraes, Judith Sargentini, Agustín Díaz de Mera, Nathalie Griesbeck and Sylvie Guillaume.*

This is the second time that a European Parliament delegation has been to Tunisia in the last six months following the fall of Ben Ali's regime.

## **Audiovisual material**

TV Images and photos of the ad-hoc delegation to Tunisia, their visit to the refugee camps and a summary of the press conference will be made available to audiovisual media on the EP-AV webpage (see link below).

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