

Forgotten in the Tunisian Desert?

Show your solidarity with the refugees from the Libyan war in Choucha camp!

Two years ago, on 19th March 2011, a coalition, led by France, Great Britain and the USA, started bombing Libya, and on 31st March, NATO officially declared war against the Gaddafi regime. Hundreds of thousands of people had to flee Libya, among them were many migrant workers and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa, who were suspected of being of Gaddafi's mercenaries. Tunisia left her borders open and accepted about half a million refugees. Most of them were accommodated in private houses, however a few thousands were placed in Choucha camp. It is situated in a desert-like region close to the Libyan border, and was opened by the UNHCR at the end of February 2011. At times it was hosting more than 20.000 people (most of them Sub-Saharan Africans).

By now, most of these refugees have left Tunisia. The majority returned to their countries of origin, not all of them really voluntarily. Some of them returned to Libya, where the rights of migrants are still being violated every day. Others tried to reach Europe by boat, risking their lives. About 2600 people were accepted by some European countries, the US, or Australia thanks to a so-called "resettlement program". But states that took part in the war, like France and UK, allowed only one or two of these refugees to enter. As the participation in the war by NATO countries was justified with the purpose to protect civilians – which is for many reasons a doubtful argument, especially because wars always worsen the situation of normal people – it seems rather two-faced not to take responsibility for the fate of Sub-Saharan refugees, who are trapped in unbearable conditions as a direct result of NATO intervention. More than 1300 people from 13 different countries, predominately from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Chad and Nigeria, still languish in the Choucha camp, which the UNHCR wants to close in June 2013 at the latest. Most of them are waiting for resettlement. About 400 people have been recognized as refugees, but did not get access to the resettlement program, because they arrived after December 2011, when the procedures were terminated. The UNHCR wants to integrate these refugees locally in Tunisia using funds which were donated by the German government rather than allowing them to go to Europe – a perfect example of the EU carrying out its policy of externalizing refugee management! At the end of February, the refugees launched a protest at the UNHCR office in Zarzis, demanding resettlement to a country with an asylum system. They do not feel safe in Tunisia and were not awarded a legal status, because Tunisia does not yet have laws concerning asylum. More than 200 people, who have been denied the status of refugees because of procedures that included inappropriate interpreters and other flaws, are now deprived of food and basic services in Choucha camp and separated from people recognized as refugees. The UNHCR declared itself not to be responsible for these people and puts pressure on them to leave the camp and go back to their countries of origin or to Libya, where they are threatened by persecution. Pushed to the limit, they choose to go to Tunis at the end of January to carry their demands to the UNCHR, the European Union and the Tunisian authorities as well as any country that may provide protection. After one week of protests and negotiations, their demands remain:

- To reopen the asylum cases of all rejected asylum seekers
- To grant international protection to all those who have fled the war in Libya

And together with those refugees protesting in Zarzis, they demand:

- To resettle all the refugees from Choucha camp and other places in Tunisia in safe countries with effective systems of protection

We, groups and networks from Europe and several African countries, support these demands. We wrote a letter to the UNHCR, organised a fax campaign and some actions at UNHCR offices in Europe.

We encourage all participants of the World Social Forum to support these demands, to join the Choucha refugees' struggle and think about actions to show their solidarity in their respective countries!

We call on the UNHCR and the European governments, especially those who intervened in the war in Libya, to take on their responsibilities and to provide protection and a life in dignity for all these refugees in Europe instead of externalizing refugee management to poor and unstable countries like Tunisia!

More information and an account for donations on our Blog:

<http://chouchaprotest.noblogs.org/>

and on these websites:

www.ffm-online.org

www.voiceofchoucha.wordpress.com

www.afrique-europe-interact.net

www.borderline-europe.de

We invite all people, who want to support the Choucha refugees, to a **meeting during the WSF in Tunis** to discuss together with the refugees what we can do in Tunisia and in our respective countries. You will find the time and place of this meeting on our blog – or call this (Tunisian) phone number: (00216) 21114547

Transnational Choucha Solidarity Group

with members of the following groups and networks:

Afrique-Europe-Interact

all included

ARCI

Article 13

borderline europe

CeTuMA

FFM

Welcome to Europe