

# African asylum seekers' protest goes international

## Solidarity rallies expected in front of Israeli embassies around the world.

By Ilan Lior | Jan. 22, 2014 | 11:17 PM |

The asylum seekers' protest has gone beyond Israel's borders. Solidarity rallies were held Wednesday in front of Israeli embassies in various cities including New York, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Toronto and Stockholm.

Thousands of asylum seekers were expected to gather in Levinsky Park in south Tel Aviv on Thursday morning, and in the afternoon they planned to protest once more in front of foreign embassies. They demand that the new amendment to the Prevention of Infiltration Law be repealed, that the people being held in the Saharonim detention center or the Holot facility be released and that refugee status be granted to eligible individuals.

This month, the Population, Immigration and Border Authority ordered 1,700 African asylum seekers living in Israeli cities to report to the Holot facility within 30 days.

Muatsam Ali, one of the leaders of the asylum seekers' protest, was among these 1,700. He was handed the order on Sunday, when he reported to the agency's Tel Aviv offices to renew his temporary visa.

Agency officials said in December they would begin with the asylum seekers who had been in Israel the longest. Most of the people who have received the summons have been in Israel for at least six years; Ali has been here for four and a half years.

Ali said the clerk who gave him the document told him that he was known to be one of the protest leaders, and he is sure his summons was deliberate.

A Sudanese national, Ali applied for asylum in Israel around three years ago but has not received a reply. He said he will report to Holot if necessary, but will not stop the struggle.

A hunger strike by asylum seekers at the Saharonim prison ended yesterday, after 17 days, when the last 26 of the 130 hunger strikers resumed eating.

Interior Ministry officials said 560 Africans are expected to leave Israel by the end of the month as part of a voluntary program that includes a cash payment of \$3,500.

In 2013, 2,600 Africans left Israel as part of the program.

A spokesperson for the Population, Immigration and Border Authority commented, "According to the Prevention of Infiltration Law, the Population, Immigration and Border Authority has the power to summon any infiltrator to the open lodging facility without restriction. At the same time, it has been decided that at first, men who are not heads of families, who have been here the longest, will be summoned. Muastam Ali infiltrated into Israel in May 2009. We reject the assertions that he was summoned to Holot because he is active in the infiltrators' struggle. We emphasize that Interior Minister Gideon Sa'ar issued an order to prioritize the examination of asylum requests made by infiltrators from Eritrea and Sudan in general, and in particular those from infiltrators living in the open center at Holot and those being held in custody in Saharonim."