



Daily Message by the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Hon. Evarist Bartolo

26th May 2020

I would like to thank our partners in Libya for intercepting boats full of irregular migrants to Europe along the Malta route in the last few days.

We understand how difficult this is especially because of the ongoing conflict and the people who are suffering its effects. The Libyan authorities have a lot to deal with.

Despite all this in the last few days the Libyan Coast Guards worked hard and went out to sea to pick up boats full of migrants that had been sent illegally from Libya headed for Malta.

They took back boats packed with about 400 people in all who otherwise would have ended up in our waters.

From the beginning of this year the traffickers and people smugglers sent more than 7,000 migrants on boats across the Mediterranean.

Of these the Libyan Coast Guard took back over 3,000.

We have begun building good relations with the UN-recognised Libyan government and we will continue to work towards developing and strengthening these links.

We support a united Libya in Libyan hands.

We support a peaceful solution in Libya in the interest of Libyans, a Libya which is one of the richest countries in the Mediterranean.

We wish to work with Libya to break the organised criminal rings spread all over Libya which run the trafficking and people smuggling rackets: as they rake in money by allowing migrants to first (illegally) cross the Libyan border and then by transporting them to special centres and warehouses till they take them to the coast and put them on boats to Europe.

It is not easy to break those criminal rings. They form part of the black economy in Libya, along with trafficking of drugs, arms and oil smuggling. We would do well to work with the Libyans to undermine this business that treats migrants like hugely profitable merchandise.

The war against this organised criminality must be fought on land: where the traffickers and smugglers have their centres and where they keep their boats on the coast.

The more we can stop them piling people onto boats they buy from various European countries, the better.

We must disrupt their illegal business and destroy their structures.

The war against traffickers and people smugglers must also be waged at sea, to bring back the boats they pack with people: cargo that rakes in huge profits for them.

Together with the Libyans we must build specialised centres run in a decent and humane way, to house migrants while they apply for asylum if they qualify for it, and to be sent back to their country if they don't.



A large number of the migrants who pay to catch a boat to Europe from North Africa do not qualify for asylum.

They are people who are losing their jobs because of the economic downturn brought about by Covid-19 and they are migrating in search of jobs not fleeing war or persecution.

Covid-19 is making life more difficult for everyone: both for those African countries which migrants leave from, as well as those countries they cross to get to the Mediterranean coast and the countries they head for. In Africa it is estimated that 28 million people will sink into extreme poverty. In North African many jobs are being lost. In Europe millions of jobs are being lost.

While those who want to leave their current home in search of a better life increase, the actual opportunities for a better life where they want to go are getting scarcer.

It is going to become much more difficult for more developed countries to take in migrants because they themselves will be building their economy anew and trying to create new jobs for their own citizens.

This is one of the biggest challenges the world is going to face after Covid-19 and we had better think seriously what we are going to do about it.

Evarist Bartolo

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Malta