

Human Rights Group Says Italian Police Abusing Refugees During Processing



Rome, November 3 (RHC)-- A leading human rights group says that Italian police have used measures which may amount to "torture" while attempting to fingerprint refugees trying to enter the country. In a report published on Thursday, Amnesty International says: "The European Union's pressure on Italy to 'get tough' on refugees and migrants has led to unlawful expulsions and ill-treatment which in some cases may amount to torture."

Italy is one of the main European arrival points for people trying to escape persecution and poverty in African countries, especially Libya. In September 2015, the EU called on Italy and Greece, which also receives a large number of refugees, to identify and fingerprint the arrivals who later try to pass into other European countries. Amnesty refers to the process as the "hotspot approach."

In accordance with EU regulations, refugees are obligated to stay in the country where they first arrive, the location of which is determined by where they are fingerprinted. Amnesty said that out of a total of 170 refugees it had interviewed since last year, 24 claimed that they were ill-treated and even sexually abused by the police after they refused to be subjected to fingerprinting.

A male refugee from Sudan said the police beat him with a stun baton and made him remove his clothes. “They gave me electricity with a stick, many times on the left leg, then on right leg, chest and belly,” he was quoted as saying. “I was too weak, I couldn’t resist and at that point they took both my hands and put them on the machine,” said another refugee.

The report stressed that such actions amount to torture within the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

“The hotspot approach, designed in Brussels and executed in Italy, has increased, not decreased, the pressure on frontline states. It is resulting in appalling violations of the rights of desperately vulnerable people for which the Italian authorities bear a direct responsibility and Europe’s leaders a political one,” noted Amnesty’s lead researcher on the project, Matteo de Bellis.

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