

African refugees rejected by Italy tortured, raped



Geneva, August 28 (RHC)-- African refugees who were rejected by Italy last week said they had been held by smugglers for up to two years in Libya and many had been beaten, tortured and raped, the UN migration agency reported on Tuesday.

The 190 refugees, mainly Eritreans and Somalis, were rescued in the Mediterranean on the 15th of August, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) spokesman Joel Millman told a UN briefing in Geneva.

Twenty-seven unaccompanied minors and 13 people needing urgent hospital treatment had earlier been allowed ashore in Italy but the remaining 150 waited 10 days while Italy's anti-immigrant government refused to let them disembark, until Ireland, Albania and the Vatican agreed to accept them.

Millman said IOM staff had gathered testimony from the refugees and that all were malnourished and exhausted and said they had been held against their will in Libya for up to two years.

"In Libya they complained that many had been beaten and tortured by smugglers and traffickers seeking ransom money from their families in their countries of origin," he said, adding that many women examined by Italian doctors said they have been raped in Libya.

He said IOM believes thousands of refugees were still being detained, held in safehouses or warehoused, but getting people to the shore had recently become more difficult because of violence in the west of the country.

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