

Czech Police Write ID Numbers on Asylum Seekers' Arms



Prague, September 3 (RHC)-- Thousands of asylum seekers fleeing conflict-stricken countries in the Middle East and Africa have converged on Europe via the Mediterranean over the last few months. Apparently at a loss of how to deal with the uninvited guests, the Czech Republic decided to deal with the influx Nazi-style.

Czech police are now writing identification numbers on the arms of asylum seekers, eerily reminiscent of Nazi Germany's practice of marking the forearms of "concentration camp prisoners."

Over 200 asylum seekers, mostly from Syria, got their arms branded by the marker wielding Czech police at the Breclav train station, sparking fury among many human rights groups and activists around the globe.

"They are treating them in a way that could look like they are branding them or doing what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany," said vice-chairman of MigrationWatch, Alp Mehmet. "What never stops amazing me are people who look at the Holocaust and think that it only holds lessons for Germans and Jews," said Andrew Stroehlein, the European media director of Human Rights Watch.

"There is no law allowing the police to mark people like this," said a lawyer with the Czech Human Rights League, Zuzana Candigliota. Unlike most other European Union member states, the Czech Republic

maintains that people who enter the country without a registered asylum request should be returned to the country from which they arrived.

Interior ministry spokeswoman Lucie Novakova defended the move, saying it was initiated because of the increasing number of children among asylum seekers. "Our goal is to prevent the children from getting lost." She added: "We also write the code of the train they have arrived on so that we know which country we should return them to within the readmission system."

In the UN parlance, the term refugee is defined as "a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

According to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated. Based on regulations of the UK and some other countries, a person is officially referred to as a refugee when the government accepts their claim for asylum. However, an asylum seeker is somebody who has left his or her country of birth and has formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded.

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