

Human rights group accuses French authorities of intimidating those helping refugees

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Paris, June 6 (RHC)-- Amnesty International has criticized the French government, accusing authorities there of intimidating those who are involved in supporting migrants. In a new report on Wednesday, the UK-based rights group said the authorities were engaged in a deliberate attempt "to curtail acts of solidarity" offered by activists to asylum seekers and refugees in the north of France.

"French authorities have harassed, intimidated and even violently assaulted people offering humanitarian aid and other support." Lisa Maracani, Amnesty's Human Rights Defenders Researcher, also revealed that providing food to the hungry have become increasingly risky in France.

"Providing food to the hungry and warmth to the homeless have become increasingly risky activities in northern France, as the authorities regularly target people offering help to migrants and refugees," Maracani said, adding, "The role of human rights defenders who offer them support is crucial."

Several human rights defenders told the rights body that acts of intimidation, threats of arrest and abuse have become "part and parcel of their daily work." According to Amnesty, activists had experienced insomnia, stress and anxiety while others describe the impact of prosecutions as debilitating.

One humanitarian worker said that she was violently pushed to the ground and choked by police in June 2018 after she had filmed four officers chasing a foreign national in Calais. The report, "Targeting Solidarity," said refugees have no regular access to food, water, sanitation, shelter or legal assistance and are subject to evictions, harassment, and violence at the hands of the police.

The rights group also said even after the demolition of the "Jungle" more than 1,200 people are still living in tents and informal camps in the area around the port city of Calais.

Earlier, a French court sentenced a preacher to two years in prison for helping refugees try to cross the English Channel in inflatable boats. Over two and a half years have passed since the closure of a refugee camp in Calais. The refugees who were evicted from the camp have since been living in dire conditions.

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