

British prime minister says Ukrainian refugees could be sent to Rwanda

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British PM Boris Johnson, making his address at the opening ceremony on June 24, 2022, during the opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at Kigali Convention

Center in Rwanda. (Photo by AFP)

London, June 25 (RHC)-- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has warned that Ukrainian asylum seekers face being deported to Rwanda forcefully if they travel to the UK without legal authorization, despite his previous promises that such deportations were “simply not going to happen.”

Asked before the Commonwealth heads of government meeting (CHOGM) in the Rwandan capital Kigali, whether Ukrainians arriving by boat could face deportation to east Africa, Johnson said: “I’m afraid the answer is I suppose, yes, in theory that could happen.”

“The only circumstances in which people will be sent to Rwanda would be if they come to the UK illegally, and thereby undermine the safe and legal routes that we have,” he added.

The UK government’s Rwanda asylum scheme, a five-year program that aims to deport refugees to Rwanda forcefully, is widely denounced by rights groups and international bodies around the world. The United Nations’ refugee chief has called it “catastrophic.”

Enver Solomon, chief executive of the Refugee Council, denounced the British premier’s move and said, “In stark contrast to the British public who have opened their doors to welcome Ukrainians in desperate search of safety, our prime minister has confirmed that the government is intent on treating them as human cargo to be transported from the UK to Rwanda.”

Britain has vowed to pursue its controversial policy to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda after the European human rights court issued last-minute injunctions to stop the deportation of the first group of migrants.

Furthermore, Shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper said, “It is disgraceful that the prime minister thinks it is OK to send Ukrainians fleeing war who arrive here without the right papers thousands of miles to Rwanda instead.”

“We have warned repeatedly that this policy is unworkable, unethical, extortionately expensive and risks making people trafficking worse. The prime minister should abandon this now,” Cooper added.

Johnson’s remarks came after he defended his government’s arrangement to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda last week. However, the first flight was blocked at the last minute by the European human rights court.

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