

## **JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE PRESS STATEMENT**

### **Africans deported from Spain and Morocco risk death in Sahara desert**

“Among the deportees, there are a number of refugees, some of them with UNHCR (UN refugee agency) papers. There are also pregnant women and children, many of whom are sick. One man told of how people, injured in the attempt to enter Spanish territory, were left to die in the desert”, said Fr Buades SJ, a Spanish Jesuit in telephone contact with the deportees.

States have an obligation to identify those fleeing persecution and grant them asylum, and to ensure the orderly and humane return of the rest. Collective and indiscriminate expulsions are prohibited by international law. Spain’s refusal to admit refugees to its asylum process is tantamount to support for the collective expulsions carried out by Morocco.

“What I have been told is extremely disturbing. One man who tried to enter Ceuta on 28 September said that the Spanish authorities forced him back brutally into Morocco. He said that both the Spanish and Moroccan authorities were shooting at them, and talked of bodies falling to the ground” added Fr. Buades SJ.

Upon expulsion from Spain, the Moroccan authorities immediately undertook mass deportations – some by plane to Senegal and Mali – and others by bus, driving people into the desert and abandoning hundreds of them there without water, at least 30 kms from the nearest town.

“This is a flagrant breach of international law. Both Spain and Morocco are bound by the UN Refugee Convention and the Convention Against Torture, not to return refugees to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened. Yet refugees trying to enter Spain literally have to climb barbed wire and face bullets to seek protection from persecution,” said Fr. Buades SJ.

In 1992 Spain and Morocco signed an agreement whereby irregular migrants from either are readmitted to the other. Yet, the agreement includes no provision for people seeking asylum and no legal procedures for return of third country nationals to their countries of origin. Other countries have signed similar readmission agreements, such as Italy with Libya, and similar human rights abuses have been the inevitable result.

Migration and refugee flows will not be resolved by building higher walls or by shooting at migrants. Action to address human rights abuses and poverty in the countries of origin of the migrants is the only effective answer.

We urge that:

- the international community ensure that urgent humanitarian assistance reaches those who have been deported into the Sahara desert;
- an independent enquiry be established by UN, EU and civil society to investigate the events that led to the deaths and injuries at Ceuta and Melilla;
- the Moroccan and Spanish authorities halt deportations until access to fair asylum determination processes is guaranteed;
- returns carried out be consistent with procedural guarantees and human rights standards under international law; and governments signing readmission agreements include guarantees respecting access to asylum and rights on removal.

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