

Slavery in Libya Exemplifies How the Refugee Crisis Has Led to a Loss of Humanity

How, in 2017, is African slavery still a widespread tragedy? The answer lies in the populations of people defined by loss and displacement: migrants. In the past couple years, the refugee crisis has presented difficulties regarding safe voyages and entrance into European countries. As a result, it has become a regular practice for African migrants to be manipulated by human traffickers, sold in auctions and subsequently be beaten, raped and used for either sex trade or labor. Due to the large number of migrants from Africa in war-torn areas with little governmental protection, the underground slave practices have persisted with little intervention. Recently, explosive reports of slavery networks transporting people from Nigeria to Libya have circulated on media networks and amassed attention from international governments. But the problem with slavery, and more importantly African migrants has presented no easy fix.

In fact, many African migrants face a Catch-22: African migrants can either remain in detention centers, be sold into slavery with promises to reach Europe (which inevitably never happens), risk death in making the passage via boat, or wait for an opportunity for the UN or other international organization to bring them to Europe, which is highly unlikely given the current refugee restrictions in European countries.

Although there is no consensus on when the human trafficking and slavery networks began throughout Africa and the Middle East, Global Slavery Index has estimated large populations of slaves in the area for years. The 2016 Global Slavery Index estimated that there are more than 6 million slaves in Sub-Saharan Africa and another 2.9 million in the Middle East and Northern Africa. In 2016, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) released a report that found that nearly 70% of migrants using the Mediterranean route from North Africa to Europe endured human trafficking. Even with predictions, slavery networks have remained hidden and prominent in Libya.

The lack of oversight in the war-torn country can be strikingly tied to the on-the-

ground departments that manage African migrants. The UN detailed that groups that have been tasked with aiding migrants in Libyan detention centers have been implicated in the selling of slaves. According to a report from June 2017, the UN noted that “International Organization for Migration (IOM) also reported enslavement of sub-Saharan migrants. Smugglers, as well as the Department to Counter Illegal Migration and the coastguard, are directly involved in such grave human rights violations.”

In response, the IOM has transported 13,000 migrants out of detention facilities in Libya and 8,000 detention centers in Niger, according to a November 2017 report from the UN. The UN has also been considering implementing sanctions on Libya for the negligence of human trafficking in the country.

The EU has also responded by pledging a €44 billion “Marshall Plan” for Africa to help block further human trafficking. Leaders in Europe have also pledged to help aid the problem, particularly French President Emmanuel Macron, who visited Africa and met with leaders to strategize a solution.

Despite recent plans that advance a façade that the EU has effectively aided the problem, strict immigration laws in countries and recent reports point to the EU as partially responsible. In response to such reports, Macron raised more controversy when he said that the human trafficking is caused by Africans and Africans alone, rather than by Europeans’ strict immigration policies. While he was in Burkina Faso, Macron visited the University of Ouagadougou and said “It’s not the French who are the traffickers, it’s the Africans. So, everyone should understand the responsibility, and we’ve started to do that, to dismantle them. But stop the argument saying, ‘It’s someone else.’”

Even though the traffickers are indeed African, the EU has inevitably become involved in funding policies that regulate migration in Libya. According to a report from Amnesty International, the EU sponsored million-dollar anti-migration measures in Niger, including assisting police operations that block transportation to the Libyan border. In addition, the EU has allegedly supported the Libyan Coast Guard, which has been found to help facilitate human trafficking.

Italy, which boasts some of Europe’s strictest immigration policies, has also been found aiding the Libyan Coast Guard. In February 2017, Italy issued a code of

conduct, which required NGOs to enter a “commitment not to enter Libyan territorial waters, except in situations of grave and imminent danger requiring immediate assistance and not to obstruct Search & Rescue by the Libyan Coast Guard.”

The EU’s support for the Libyan Coast Guard did not go unnoticed, however. The UN Human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said “The European Union’s policy of assisting the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept and return migrants in the Mediterranean (is) inhuman.”

With increased international attention to slavery networks in Niger and Libya, the UN has facilitated conversations about possible solutions. Filippo Grandi, the UN refugee chief, told Reuters that the UN has “heard finally authorities—Libyan authorities, the international community—talk about practical measures and how to respond to those abuses, to try to stop them, and to try to find solutions for the people affected by them.”

Grandi also announced that the focus of the aid will be on the detention centers and facilities that have been exposed to have been places where migrants face risks of being trafficked. Grandi said “We will also need to have more access...to the detention centers to do the work that we want to do.”

With the need for reform more urgent than ever, the UN and governments have more motivation than ever to relieve the crisis. Although slavery in Libya has debilitated thousands of people, the situation has translated how the refugee crisis led to such an immoral human tragedy. Most importantly, slavery in Libya has exemplified that despite the illusion of societal improvements in the 21st century, the world still has devastated and discriminated vulnerable communities of people.

Source: <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/slavery-libya-exemplifies-refugee-crisis-led-loss-humanity/>

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