



46th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, 22 February – 23 March 2021

Item 2 - General Debate - Rights of migrants and Balkan route

Oral statement delivered by: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)

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Madam President,

APG23 and 10 co-signing NGOs are concerned about the continued systematic and institutionalised violation of the rights of migrants crossing the Balkan route to Europe.

We refer to thousands of persons who are spending the freezing Balkan and Greek winters in camps, often lacking the fundamental rights. According to reports of NGOs directly monitoring the situation, including some co-signatories of this statement, people in camps live in dreadful conditions lacking heating, electricity and proper sanitation. This causes the insurgence of illness and degradation of living, and exposes several persons to inhuman and degrading treatments. Indeed, there are remarkably high cases of self-harm and suicide attempts inside the camps, even among children.

Furthermore, the current COVID19 health crisis has often been used as an instrument of pressure by the host countries against both migrants and NGOs, creating a strong criminalisation of those who denounce the current situation. Permissions to leave the camps are often denied even if migrants present evidence of serious proven health problems. At the same time, it is increasingly difficult for NGOs to support migrants. The current law of some host countries foresees heavy fines for helping migrants and some NGOs have even been accused by the authorities of abetting illegal immigration after reporting pushbacks by the coast guard.

Finally, other illegal practices continue to be carried out, such as the violent pushbacks of migrants on land and sea, as well as the registration of people as adults even if they are minors, to reduce the State's reception costs.

We believe that time has come to put an end to these human rights violations, which have taken place for too long and that risk becoming even more systematic trends perpetrated with impunity. It is critical to find long-term solutions and reflect on the underlying reasons and policies that have triggered the situation.

Thank you!