

World leaders, activists seek end to modern slave auctions in Libya

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.05.17

Word Count **837**

Level **1220L**



A picture taken on November 27, 2017, shows an African migrant woman and children waiting at the Tariq Al-Matar detention center on the outskirts of the Libyan capital Tripoli. Photo by: Taha Jawashi/AFP/Getty Images

2 World leaders may have been quick to voice outrage over video footage of Libyan slave auctions, but activists raised the alarm months ago. Their warnings fell on deaf ears.

3 Aid workers, human rights groups and analysts say they had been shouting until they were blue in the face. They were trying to spread the word about rape, torture and forced work for thousands of black Africans in the war-torn North African country.

4 CNN Video Shines Light On Slave Auctions

5 But it took CNN's footage of young Africans being auctioned off near Libya's capital, Tripoli, to force Western and African leaders into a flurry of condemnation. The footage was filmed on a hidden camera and aired on November 14.

6 United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said he was "horrified," and African Union chief Alpha Conde said he was "outraged."

7 France requested an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council, with President Emmanuel Macron branding the auctions a crime against humanity.

8 But human rights groups and experts have charged leaders with hypocrisy.

9 "Everyone Knew About This"

10 Hamidou Anne is a Senegalese analyst at think-tank L'Afrique des Idees. "Ordinary people aside, everyone knew about this - governments, international organizations, political leaders," Anne said.

11 Alioune Tine, Amnesty International's West Africa director, said hostage-takings, violence, torture and rape were well documented in Libya.

12 "And we've been talking about slavery for a long time," he added.

13 In 2011, the fall of dictator Moammar Gadhafi tipped Libya into chaos. The country became a massive transit hub for sub-Saharan Africans setting sail for Europe.

14 The European Union (EU) has been desperate to stop the flow of migrating people. More than 1.5 million migrants have arrived in Europe since 2015, according to United Nations (U.N.) figures.

15 But leaders are at a loss to find solutions for the asylum seekers on the other side of the Mediterranean.

16 This month the EU faced heavy criticism from the U.N. over its training of the Libyan coast guard, which the U.N.'s rights chief said resulted in migrants being sent back to "horrific" prisons.

17 "Unimaginable Horrors Endured By Migrants in Libya"

18 With EU support, Italy has been training Libyan coast guards to intercept boats as part of a controversial deal that has seen migrant arrivals decrease almost 70 percent since July.

19 But the U.N. charges that the policy leaves migrants returned to Libya at risk of torture, rape, forced labor and theft.

20 "The international community cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the unimaginable horrors endured by migrants in Libya," U.N. rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said.

21 The EU hit back that its coast guard training has helped save lives, since nearly 3,000 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean this year. Meanwhile, EU aid has helped U.N. agencies to send 10,000 migrants home from Libya voluntarily.

22 In Gambia, in West Africa, Karamo Keita set up a group to warn fellow youngsters not to attempt the trip to Europe. On his own attempt to reach Europe, he suffered horrific abuses in Libya, including slave labor.

23 "Libyan Guy Sold Us As Slaves"

24 "In Libya, black people have no right," he said back in September.

25 "We were taken to various farms where the Libyan guy sold us as slaves. We worked on the farms for free."

26 The International Organization for Migration had in April reported the existence of markets where migrants became "commodities to be bought."

27 Joanne Liu is the head of medical charity Doctors Without Borders. She wrote an open letter to European governments warning of the thriving kidnapping, torture and theft business.

28 Europe Said Partly To Blame, Some Say

29 She asked if European governments were ready to accept that their efforts to stop migration also made those migrants into targets for torture, slavery and rape. "We can't say we didn't know about this," she said.

30 Amnesty International's Tine said that in its efforts to stop migrants arriving "at all cost," Europe bore "a fundamental responsibility" for the horrors in Libya.

31 Yet others are also to blame, he said.

32 "African countries do nothing to make their young people stay, to give them work," he said.

33 "A Crime Against Humanity"

34 Analyst Hamidou Anne also said an inadequate response from African leaders was in part to blame for the unfolding disaster. He said systematic racism in the Northern African Maghreb countries, where Libya is found, makes it worse.

35 "This cannot go on," he said.

36 "Faced with a crime against humanity you don't condemn it, you act."

37 The tiny country of Rwanda, in East Africa, has offered, since the scandal broke, to take in 30,000 Africans from Libya.

38 Migration commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos meanwhile said on Thursday that the EU was "working without let-up" to find solutions.

39 Tine said slavery needed to be on the agenda at a European-African summit on November 29-30 in West Africa's Ivory Coast. Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou floated this idea earlier as well.

40 Tine called for an "impartial investigation to see how the trafficking is organized and who is behind it."

41 And, he added, "everyone must take their responsibilities."

[https://
newsela.com/
pages/terms-of-
use/](https://newsela.com/pages/terms-of-use/)