

Press Release

Belgium resettles 25 refugees ex Libya

Brussels, 18 July 2011

Arrival in Belgium of 25 Eritrean and Congolese refugees ex Libya.

25 African refugees have arrived today in Belgium. Belgium thus responded to the call of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the EU member states to resettle African refugees ex Libya. When the uprising in Libya broke out the 25 refugees found temporary refuge in Tunisia, but they were in urgent need of resettlement to a third country. Accompanied by officials from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), they arrived today at Brussels Airport on a flight from Tunis.

Following a decision reached by the Inner Cabinet in March 2011, Melchior Wathelet, State Secretary for Migration and Asylum Policy, authorized the timely transfer of 25 refugees to Belgium. *"They are in need of protection and I'm proud that Belgium, just as other European countries, takes up its responsibilities. To offer protection to those who are in need of it, is not only an international but also a moral obligation."* says Melchior Wathelet.

The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) selected 6 families and some isolated persons among the cases submitted by the UNHCR. All are Eritrean or Congolese nationals. *"Resettlement is the best and only solution for them. Their return to Eritrea or the DRC is not an option. Their conditions in the Tunisian refugee camp have become unbearable. These 25 men, women and children are in a situation of great vulnerability. Today, they have the opportunity to take a new start in our country"*, says Commissioner General Dirk Van den Bulck.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees assisted the Tunisian authorities with the organization of a temporary refuge in the Shusha refugee camp, near the Libyan border. According to UNHCR's local representative for Western Europe, Wilbert van Hövell, *"4 000 Africans, mainly from Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia, are staying in the Shusha refugee camp. Solutions have to be found quickly for these people because they cannot stay there any longer. We are delighted to see that Belgium offers some of them the protection they need. This is also a way to help Tunisia"*.

Officials from Fedasil were at the airport to welcome the 25 Eritrean and Congolese refugees. After a short stay in a reception centre, they will follow an integration course (housing, language, school, work,...) before settling for good in our country.

The resettlement of 25 refugees in Belgium was made possible by EU funding through the European Refugee Fund (ERF). Also several other EU member states, such as the Netherlands, Ireland and Portugal, responded the call to participate in this European resettlement programme.

This is the second time in the past few years that Belgium responds to an international call to resettle refugees from conflict areas. In September 2009, 47 refugees from Iraq were resettled in Belgium.

More information on www.reinstallation.be

Press contacts:

Spokesperson for Melchior Wathelet, State Secretary for Migration and Asylum Policy

Benoît Pitance

Mobile phone : +32 497 792 478

Office of the UN High Commissioner for refugees (UNHCR)

Vanessa Saenen

Mobile phone: +32 476 420 134

Phone: +32 2 627 59 32

Federal Agency for the reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil)

Vinciane Masurelle

Phone: +32 2 213 44 11

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Jo De Backer

Phone: +32 2 287 74 14

Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS)

An Michiels

Phone: +32 2 205 51 75