

# Survivors of Lampedusa tragedy among refugees brutalised in Italian camp

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Footage shot on a cell phone and shown on Italian State television station RAI2 Tuesday, shows migrants at a camp on the island of Lampedusa being forced to strip naked, in mixed company, and then being hosed down by staff.

The camp is used to detain refugees from Africa and the Middle East who have made the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Italy by boat, in a desperate attempt to enter Europe.

The footage was filmed by one migrant, with another providing commentary. Speaking about the ordeal, one of the two identified as Khalid said he and fellow refuge-seekers were lined up and treated “like animals.”

The footage shows men and boys queuing up in a crowded, open-air courtyard in cold winter conditions and then, one by one, having to strip completely naked. At least two men at the camp are shown standing with no clothes on, while others are undressing. One man is seen standing with his arms out, as a worker in overalls sprays him from head to foot. Some migrants can be seen attempting to maintain some modesty by covering their genitals with their hands.

According to the commentary, women were not exempt from this treatment and detainees had to do this every few days, after being told it was to supposedly part of an effort to combat a scabies outbreak.

Around 26 of the asylum seekers hosed down were said to be survivors of the sinking of their vessel off Lampedusa in October that resulted in the loss of 350 lives. That tragedy, with mostly African victims, was followed eight days by another just off the island in which 34 migrants, mainly from Syria and Palestine, were drowned when their boat capsized.

The *Corriere della Sera* noted, “The film is understood to have been shot on 13 December, but

migrants say that disinfection is carried out on a weekly basis.”

It adds, “Among those subjected to the treatment, apparently, are Eritreans, Syrians, Ghanaians, Nigerians and Kurds, including some of the survivors of the 3 October shipwreck.”

Lampedusa mayor Giusi Nicolini said the images were, “reminiscent of a concentration camp. It shows that this manner of welcoming is something that should shame Lampedusa and shame Italy. It needs to change. This was not what we were expecting to see just two months after the shipwreck that prompted so many tears and promises.”

The organisation that runs the camp, the Lampedusa Accoglienza cooperative, moved quickly to blame the migrants. Its chief executive, Cono Galipò, claimed the migrants decided to strip naked of their own free will during a procedure to eliminate parasites. Speaking to *Radio Città Futura*, he said, “The treatment we were doing, performed under the terms of a protocol, was taking an hour and a half and, at a certain point, some of the immigrants ran out of patience and took off their clothes. They clearly set up what can be seen.”

Since the horrific incident, representatives of the ruling elite in Italy and throughout Europe have cried shame at the latest events at Lampedusa. This is rank hypocrisy from the authors of the policies that have forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homelands in the first place and who have laid down the anti-immigrant policy known as “Fortress Europe”.

Enrico Letta, the Italian prime minister, claimed he was “shocked” by the footage, adding that the “government will conduct an in-depth inquiry and will take to task whoever is responsible”.

Italy's interior minister, Angelino Alfano, said a report into the images would be ready within 24 hours,

adding that “whoever erred will pay.”

The speaker of the Italian parliament, Laura Boldrini, said, “Stripping men and women naked outside in the middle of winter [is] unworthy of a civilized country.”

The European Commission's home affairs chief, Cecilia Malmstrom, said, "The images we have seen from the detention centre in Lampedusa are appalling and unacceptable.”

"We have already started investigations into the appalling conditions in many Italian detention centres, including Lampedusa,” she added.

In a Twitter message, she stated: “The EU is committed to assist Italy in receiving migrants, but it has to be done in decent conditions. We will not hesitate to launch an infringement procedure to make sure EU standards and obligations are fully respected.”

What this all translates to is that repression of immigrants must continue, while avoiding where possible embarrassing displays of brutality.

European Union leaders' are to meet in a summit Thursday and Friday and will discuss proposals regarding the future of its migration policy. None of the proposals are based on defending the democratic rights of migrants and asylum seekers. Measures to be discussed include the strengthening of border surveillance against “illegal migration”.

The European Commission has recommended reinforcing air and sea patrols on the Mediterranean to detect and intercept migrant boats trying to reach European shores. This plan, estimated to cost an extra 14 million euros (\$19 million) a year, is entirely in line with a plan drawn up by the EU border patrol agency FRONTEX.

FRONTEX already has its own fleet of planes, helicopters and boats, uses drones and advanced surveillance technology, and can deploy border guards from various member states at any time.

The Commission also proposes to allocate 50 million euros to help countries facing “high migratory pressure,” including 30 million euros for Italy.

The footage at Lampedusa gives a small glimpse of the suffering and indignities faced by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in camps throughout the EU. The Lampedusa camp currently has 391 migrants, including 36 children, living in a structure built for 250.

According to a report released Tuesday by the Save the Children charity, the conditions at the camp failed

to ensure "basic human rights." It noted many are forced to sleep out in the cold due to the overcrowded conditions.

It also found that many of the new migrants making the dangerous sea crossings to Italy this year came from Syria.

Syria has been devastated by a two-and-a-half year civil war fomented by the main imperialist powers, which sponsored the opposition groups fighting the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad. New figures released this week by the United Nations refugee agency found that 127,000 refugees are leaving Syria every month. Syrians made up about a quarter of the 40,244 migrants reaching Italy by boat in the first 11 months were Syrians, outstripping any other nationality, said Save the Children.

The response of the European states to this humanitarian catastrophe has been to wash their hands of it. Only 10 EU states have agreed to take in a maximum of 12,000 Syrian refugees this year, Amnesty International said last week.

The closed borders of the European Union have resulted in the deaths of up to 25,000 people, who have perished attempting to enter Europe. This year is set to be the worst on record. A report released this week by the International Organisation for Migration found that more than 7,000 migrants may have perished at sea or while crossing deserts trying to reach a safe haven in 2013.



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