

# Protests after death in fire at Greece's Moria concentration camp

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Brutal anti-migrant policies claimed the life of at least one woman and possibly a child in a fire at the Moria camp on the eastern Aegean island of Lesbos.

Moria is a hellhole, established by the 2015-2019 pseudo-left Syriza government, where refugees and asylum seekers are held under intolerable conditions, pending deportation. Ostensibly built to house 3,000 people, it now hosts 12,000 in squalid conditions.

According to reports, after months of protests and repression by riot police, two fires broke out. One was contained but the other quickly spread, with large sections of the camp engulfed in flames.

On Sunday, the authorities at first reported no fatalities. But UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) Greece tweeted, “we learned with deep sadness that the lives of a woman and a child were lost in a fire on Lesbos today.” The BBC later reported, “They say the charred body of a woman was found at Moria camp. But unconfirmed reports say there was another victim, a child.”

The *Guardian* reported, “The body of the woman was taken to the island’s general hospital while the body of the child was handed over to authorities by migrants.”

It added, “The death toll, however, was unclear. One witness said three people died as a result of the fire, which spread to six or seven containers used as shelters. ‘We found two children completely charred and a woman dead. We gave the children covered in blankets to the fire brigade,’ Afghani migrant Fedouz, 15, said.

“An AFP [Agence France-Presse] correspondent saw two bodies, one surrounded by weeping family members.”

Other sources Monday cited the Greek Health Ministry that only one person died. The Greek Reporter website said, “A child which was initially thought to have been also killed, is injured but is recovering at a

local hospital having sustained burns.”

It is unclear how the fires started. Greek daily *Kathemerini* reported, “The fire inside the camp started shortly after 5 p.m., about 20 minutes after another blaze in an olive grove just outside the facility where hundreds of asylum seekers who cannot be accommodated inside the overcrowded camp are living in tents and other makeshift shelters.”

In an indication of the appalling conditions endured by thousands at the camp, the main fire started in one of the converted shipping containers the migrants live in, in grossly overcrowded circumstances.

After some of the migrants protested that firefighters were too slow to respond to the blaze, riot police met them with volleys of teargas. Harrowing photos and video with the camp burning in the background show men, women and children desperately seeking to flee the fire and teargas attack.

A video accompanying a Reuters news report showed scenes from the fire and its aftermath, revealing more of the horrific conditions that those in the camp live in surrounded by high fences and razor wire. Among the shocking scenes in the clip are those showing burnt out shipping containers stacked on top of each other with migrants packed around them like sardines.

A photo of a half-naked man carrying a similarly clad child—with both engulfed in teargas and fleeing past dilapidated wooden sheds that serve as shelters, with bin bags strewn by his feet—was taken by Giorgos Moutafis of Reuters. It and other photos can be viewed [here](#).

The conservative New Democracy government is planning further repression, with the *Guardian* reporting, “Additional officers were sent from Athens in C-130 army planes, although local police sources said calm had returned to the camp by 11 p.m. GMT

[Sunday].”

Built on land that once housed a military compound, the place where refugees and asylum seekers are held captive was described by Human Rights Watch in 2017 as “unfit for animals.” Migrants at the camp have long demanded that they be transferred to more hospitable and civilised living conditions on the Greek mainland.

It was only in August that the latest vicious attack was mounted against migrants at the camp by the authorities, with riot police brutally attacking a protest of around 50 child asylum seekers. Protesters chanted, “Athens-Athens,” demanding to be moved out of the camp and onto the mainland.

On Monday, the EU responded to the events at Moria with crocodile tears from European Commission Deputy Chief Spokesperson Mina Andreeva. Stating that the death of the woman was a “truly tragic event,” Andreeva continued, “The increased arrivals in Greece over the past weeks have put immense strain on an already fraught system and are creating unsustainable conditions.”

This is rank hypocrisy. Moria is the product of the “Fortress Europe” policy being imposed at the behest of Europe’s major powers. Tens of thousands of people have perished attempting to enter Europe via the Mediterranean and the Aegean over the last decade. Nearly 1,000 people have drowned in the Mediterranean this year alone.

There are well over 70,000 refugees interned in Greece in overcrowded camps on the mainland and islands as a result of the filthy deal cut between the EU and Turkey in 2016 by the Syriza government. The majority of the refugees are from Syria, Iraq and Iran and have fled homelands that have been devastated by imperialist-backed war and economic sanctions. The Turkey/Greece deal stipulates that all refugees crossing into Greece from Turkey be interned until their cases are processed, with the plan being ultimate deportation back to Turkey.

As this study published last month by the WSWS on the filthy anti-immigration record of the Syriza government notes, “Contrary to its electoral promises, Syriza not only continued the inhuman migration policies of its predecessor but intensified them dramatically.”

The Greek ruling elite could not care less about the fate of those trapped in Moria and its other camps. In

two short articles published in its online Sunday and Monday editions, the conservative-supporting *Kathemerini* devoted just 362 words to the events. The first piece had the disgusting headline, “Migrants at Moria camp light fires, clash with police.”

Despite the nauseating pose of concern by Brussels, the only response by the Greek government and EU to the terrible plight of refugees held in concentration camps such as Moria and to those seeking entry to Europe is even more repression. *Kathemerini* reported Monday afternoon, “Following a cabinet meeting in Athens, the government announced it will tighten up border control by increasing sea patrols, set up closed-structure pre-departure centres for people who have entered Greece illegally and have no right to asylum (or individuals whose asylum claim has been rejected), and create a safe country list for people who have entered the country illegally.”

The Greek Reporter website noted, “[T]he Greek coast guard has sent a new request—the second within three weeks—for additional assistance from Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency ... Greece has asked Frontex to provide state-of-the-art monitoring equipment—mainly radars and thermal cameras.”



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