

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
An International Failure: The Syrian Refugee Crisis

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Refugee testimonies gathered during research mission to Italy in November 2013:

"All I want to say is that no one should get on the boat" - young Syrian male

Anas, 17-year-old boy, Palestinian Syrian survivor of 11 October sinking

- When the water first came, I was pushed into a room or compartment and then everything went black.
- Suddenly I saw a little light. I swam until it got closer and bigger and I noticed it was a window. I climbed through it.
- When we were in the water, I saw people clinging on to dead bodies. I saw men trying to take life jackets from women.
- The reason only half the people had life jackets was because you had to buy them in Libya, and the smuggler told us it wasn't worth it because the boat was safe.
- We are a big family. I was travelling with my mum, brother, cousins, my cousin's husband and his family. I have no idea where they are.
- I was detained in Malta for three days. I was throwing up blood but still they took me to detention. Their main priority was getting my fingerprints.

Cousins A and B from Damascus, boys aged 17 and 19, survivors of 11 October sinking

- **A + B:** We paid \$1000 each plus \$200 dollars for the smugglers' agent. My nine-year-old brother paid \$500. Two days later we were taken to a cramped house with about 300 people and just one toilet. We were there for nine days. The smugglers hit people when they thought we were being too loud.
- They put us in a meat van, like sheep, and we went to the shore. There were about 500 people on the boat. One man, when he saw how crowded the boat was, said he didn't want to get on. The smugglers said he could swim and they would keep his money.
- **A:** After we left Libya, a Libyan boat shouted at us to go back, saying we were heading to death. Parents were holding up their babies. The Libyans followed us until early morning. Then they shot, at first in the air then at the bottom of the boat. They were trying to hit the motor.
- After the boat sank, I couldn't find my brother and father. I could see my cousin but every time we got near each other a wave came and we got more distant.
- I have asked everyone what has happened to my father and brother. No one knows. They remain between death and life.

A was taken to Malta and B was taken to Italy.

B: I was put in a camp. We were taken to an office where they took fingerprints. The head of police said I would be arrested if I refused. After that I was free so I went to Milan. I left Syria to pull the rest of family out, but now I am fingerprinted and I can't bring my family here. Our first experience of Europe is a lie. My experience didn't just destroy my dreams; it destroyed my families' dreams. I am destroyed completely.

Young Syrian male survivor of 11 October sinking, now in Via Aldini

- We thought that Europe cares and that they would save us. But we spent hours in the water before anyone came. So we have lost hope in Europe.
- There is discrimination and no freedom to move. They say yes we feel sorry for you but there are legal issues. Why did you let us in then? Why not leave us in the sea?
- I was stopped on the train in Austria along with around 10 others. We had already given our money to the smuggler. We asked to apply for asylum in Austria, but they said we need your fingerprints. They got our fingerprints then took us in a car back to the border with Italy.
- We were told the fingerprinting was for security/ criminal matters not for asylum, but they tricked us. And now I am trapped. They want us to be law abiding but they do not behave like that themselves.

Syrian male, now in Via Aldini

- Our families back home think Europe will help. They don't understand when I explain. I now realise that I can never get them out of Syria. It was a mistake coming here.

Um Anas, a Syrian mother of three boys, took a boat from Egypt in October

- We had heard it was a hard trip and that people drowned, but what we had tasted in Egypt was already worse than death.
- We were on that boat for days and it was very tough. We didn't really get food and water. It was like a theme park boat ride that swings back and forth. We spent the journey crying and praying. After that we spent over 20 hours on another small boat.

"The EU is just giving smugglers the opportunity. We are going to make it so why make us suffer?" - Syrian male at Via Aldini