

# STOP THE BOATS

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Why the Australian Boat Policy is the only realistic approach to the Mediterranean Migrant Crisis.

### **Introduction**

Today it is estimated that there are more than half-a-million migrants in Libya<sup>1</sup> waiting to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. For every twenty-five who make the journey, one will die whilst crossing.<sup>2</sup> Between January and April of this year some 35,000 migrants have made it to the coast of Southern Europe, more than 1,600 have died in the process.<sup>3</sup>

We are in the midst of the greatest movement of people since the end of World War Two resulting in a humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, a crisis in which the European Union, and the respective governments of Europe, have been totally incompetent in dealing with. Worldwide, the number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people has reached 50 million, just under the population of England.<sup>4</sup> With mass levels of unrest across Africa and the Middle-East, this number is certain to grow.

When boats that successfully make the crossing land in Southern Europe, their migrant cargo disperse and attempt to head North into greater Europe. Some are found by the European authorities and taken to processing centres, while many enter Europe as illegal immigrants.

Often the boats attempting the crossing are not suited to the journey and sink with migrants onboard. The goal of Operation Triton, the EU's Navy Taskforce, is to find and rescue migrant ships, then tow them to the European-based processing centres. Commodore Martin Connell, the senior commanding officer of Operation Weald, part of the Royal Navy's contribution to Operation Triton, described the crisis as "The most grim situation you could possibly find ... most of these boats won't make it."

At the processing centres, the migrants are first given food, water, and medical care, and then they are interviewed to ascertain whether they are economic migrants or legitimate asylum seekers. Economic migrants are held in detention centres until an expulsion order can be processed. This is the case for any person over the age of 18 without a work permit, family connection, or history of political persecution.

***This paper calls for a series of European-operated processing centres to be established in Northern Africa. Any migrant boats found in the Mediterranean should be rescued and redirected to these new processing centres where migrants can be identified and can start the application for asylum or legal migration into Europe.***



Refugee status is granted only to those who can prove they risk persecution or death if returned to their nation of origin. Whilst awaiting to learn the result of their asylum application, the migrants are homed in the CARA (Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers) in Italy. In 2013, 32% of asylum requests were rejected.<sup>5</sup> The reality is that the Italian processing centres are slow and overcrowded, with many attempting to flee into greater Europe before their application can be completed. In June 2015, France was forced to close sections of its border with Italy due to concerns over illegal immigration. The French government has reported that more than 6,000 migrants had to be returned to Italy in the first six months of 2015 alone.<sup>6</sup>

In Northern Africa, the mass of migrants gathering in coastal areas is having an enormously detrimental effect on the local population. In Libya, human trafficking is undermining basic industries with many fishermen opting to use their boats for the more lucrative trade of transporting people rather than for the catching of fish. This in turn has caused fish prices to rise, making them too expensive for much of the population.<sup>7</sup>

These migrants see Europe as their road to a better life, be it as a sanctuary from the horrors of war, or simply as a more stable economic environment in which to live. In doing so, and by putting themselves at the mercy of unscrupulous human traffickers, they risk their lives and the lives of their families. The only realistic way to prevent this from happening is to stop the desideratum of Europe, by stopping the boats.

## **The Migrant's Story**

Data from the UNHCR showing the nation of origin of migrants who attempt to cross the Mediterranean since October 2014 is as follows: 31% Syrian; 18% Eritrean; 25% Other African Nations; 16% Unknown.<sup>8</sup>

Of all the migrants crossing the Mediterranean, 43% are from African nations, the majority of whom are economic migrants, meaning that they are not fleeing war or persecution. There are reports of these migrants being forced to work as slaves to pay traffickers fees in order to make it to the coast, while some are imprisoned in the desert until their families agree to pay ransoms. Many migrants are tortured, while women regularly face the risk of sexual violence.<sup>9</sup>

Trafficking to the North African coast is often by way of the Sahara Desert, many take the journey unequipped and die of dehydration or starvation. It is believed that 1,790 migrants have died crossing the Sahara,<sup>10</sup> although the true figure is unknown, and is likely to be much higher.

Upon reaching the coast ,they will pay an additional fee for a boat headed to Europe. The more you can afford, the safer and less crowded the boat will be. It is believed that a sub-Saharan African is expected to pay around \$1,000 whereas a Syrian would pay up to \$2,500 for a marginally less congested crossing.<sup>11</sup> A standard 17-metre boat could be filled with anything between 300 and 800 migrants, and often sail without drinking water or navigation equipment. Captains are advised to scupper their boat should they see a European Navy vessel in order to increase their chances of rescue.

Once in Europe, those found by the authorities are taken to the processing centres where attempts are made to ascertain who they are and make some kind of record. Many have been briefed about this before leaving Africa and have rehearsed back stories, some simply clench their fists and refuse to give fingerprints.<sup>12</sup> The objective for many is to reach the economically stable promised land of Northern Europe.

### **The Effect on Britain**

Some 2,500 migrants are waiting in Calais to cross the English Channel into Britain. If the migrants successfully manage to do this, they have the right to claim asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention. They also have a right of appeal if refused.

Migrants attempting to seek asylum must be taken to one of the immigration detention centres. The UK's immigration detention estate is one of the largest in Europe. From 2009 until 2013, between 2,000 and 3,500 migrants have been in detention at any given time. Around 30,000 persons entered detention in 2013, a rise from the 29,000 that entered in 2012.<sup>13</sup>

The most common category of migration detainee are those who have sought asylum in the UK at some point. Approximately 30,400 migrants entered detention under the Immigration Act in 2013, with asylum detainees accounting for 60% of the total immigration detainee population. The estimated average cost of this to the UK taxpayer was £97.00 per person, per day. From 1997 to 2010, more than 60% of asylum applications were refused, these refused applications cost the UK taxpayer £2.3 million per day.<sup>14</sup> In 2014, there were 31,400 applications made.

The horrific journey these migrants make through the desert and over the sea, facing rape, torture, and the risk of death, only to be refused the asylum or resettlement they were promised by the traffickers, is something European nations have a moral responsibility to stop.

### **How and Why Australia Stops the Boats**

As of April 2015, Australia has zero migrant boat landings.<sup>15</sup> The total number of migrants who have died of drowning from the boats is zero.<sup>16</sup> In 2012 and 2013, more than 18,000 people arrived in Australia illegally by sea. In 2013, Australia had 24,300 migrants claim asylum, making it the eighth largest recipient of asylum seekers in the industrialised world.<sup>17</sup> ‘Operation Sovereign Borders’ is Australia’s zero tolerance policy with migrants attempting to enter the country illegally. Implemented by Tony Abbott’s government in 2013, the policy acts as a deterrent for migrants to attempt the journey. The Australian government has made it clear that it is impossible to make Australia home if you attempt to do so illegally by the sea.<sup>18</sup>

Australia sent out information to the home nations, from which their wave of migrants came, with the message not to trust the traffickers and to deter anyone from risking the journey. In addition to this they have also had success by increasing their aid budget to the migrant’s nations of origin<sup>19</sup> encouraging the development of more secure nations, in which people would want to stay, rather than travel to Australia.

The Royal Australian Navy patrol the seas, rescuing or towing the migrant boats back to their port of origin, or to the migrant processing centres set up by the Australian government in Papua New Guinea. This was done under the ‘Regional Resettlement Arrangement between Australia & Papua New Guinea’ allowing for asylum applications to take place outside Australian borders. If a migrant’s appeal for asylum

“...the only way you can stop the deaths, is in fact to stop the boats.”

— Tony Abbott <sup>21</sup>

is found to be non-genuine, they will either be repatriated, or given the opportunity to settle in Papua New Guinea. Australia supports this influx of migrants to Papua New Guinea by investing in their infrastructure.<sup>20</sup>

Tony Abbott, the Australian Prime Minister, said of the policy “It’s a refugee and humanitarian programme which has been modestly expanded because we have stopped the boats, and we are not going to do anything that will encourage people to get on boats. If we do the slightest thing to encourage ... the boats, this problem will get worse, not better. If you want to start a new life, come through the front door, not through the back door.”

#### **Applying This Policy in the Mediterranean**

If we are going to stop the illegal trafficking of people into Europe, we must follow the Australian policy of stopping the boats, thus creating a deterrent for migrants. It is clear that we must find a solution to the terrible problem of hundreds, if not thousands of people drowning in the Mediterranean in attempts to reach Europe from Africa. We must adopt policies that stop the people-smuggling trade.

By rescuing or towing the migrant boats to safe, EU-run processing centres, where the migrants can be given food, water, and medical treatment, as well as facilities for lodging asylum applications or legal immigration applications, we would end the illegal and deadly people-trafficking trade. It would also help the EU screen migrants for health issues such as Ebola, and assess potential security risks.

The call for an EU-run processing centre in North Africa is not a new one. In 2003, Nicolas Sarkozy suggested setting up “... security zones in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia” when he was France’s Internal Affairs Minister,<sup>22</sup> and more recently Germany’s Interior Minister, Thomas de Maiziere proposed migration processing centres in North Africa so that migrants might “... come to Europe legally.”<sup>23</sup>

## This Paper Proposes

1. That the EU and other European nations (bilaterally) hold talks with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in order to establish Migration Processing Centres (MPCs).
2. That the MPCs be run and operated by EU nations.
3. To offer any host nation of MPCs financial aid to support the centre.
4. To encourage the host nation to take in skilled migrants.
5. To allow migrants who wish to apply for asylum to have two attempts at applying from an MPC to two EU nations.
6. To allow migrants who wish to enter an EU nation legally to apply for the appropriate visas at an MPC.
7. To return home any migrant who fails in their application for asylum or a visa.
8. To stop any migrant boats crossing the Mediterranean, with EU nations being responsible for rescuing and towing the migrant boats to the nearest MPC in North Africa.
9. To scuttle any boats used for human trafficking, preventing them from being used again.
10. To increase aid and anti-corruption efforts across the migrants nations of origin.

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