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Press Briefing Notes - 13 October 2005

Morocco - Malian Migrants Return Home

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Two hundred and twenty Malian irregular migrants have voluntarily returned home on an IOM charter flight today from the north-eastern Moroccan town of Oujda.

The flight had been organized after requests from both the Moroccan and Malian governments for IOM to assist in the voluntary return of stranded irregular migrants.

An IOM operations team on the ground in Oujda said of 221 people interviewed, only one person had said he didn't want to return home.

According to IOM's pre-departure interviews, the migrants had been on the road from between three months to three years.

"These people have tried and tried to get a better life for themselves since leaving home but have failed. They are simply resigned to their fate. They have nothing to show for their years away and now just want to go home," said IOM's Jean Philippe Chauzy in Oujda.

With none of the migrants having travel documents, a collective laissez-passer was signed by a Malian consular official from Rabat. The official had met them on Wednesday to assess if people were really Malians before names were put on the list and the document was signed and sealed.

In addition, each of the 220 migrants signed a declaration of voluntary return with many of them using a fingerprint.

One of the men returning home on the IOM flight is 19-year-old Diarra. An unemployed youth who had not finished his schooling, Diarra was sent money by an elder brother in France to join him. He tried to scale the fences at Melilla but was pushed back. Robbed of all his money, he just wanted to go home.

"I have suffered too much here and I don't want to try again," he said.

Like Diarra, the migrants returning voluntarily to Mali accompanied by one IOM staff member, are all young men of an average age of 25. They have no luggage or belongings except a blanket provided to each of them by the Moroccan authorities. IOM

has provided footwear for those that need it.

IOM staff in Oujda said some of the men have minor injuries sustained while trying to cross the fences that divide Morocco from the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla but were in a clean environment and were being properly accommodated and fed by the Moroccan authorities.

Many of the migrants come from Mali's western region of Kayes, one of the country's poorest, and traditionally an area of high immigration potential.

"The case of the Malians is not an isolated one. In Morocco and the rest of northern Africa, there are more stranded migrants in need of assistance," said Brunson McKinley, IOM Director General.

"We are regularly asked to help and we do help where resources permit. The numbers of migrants now appearing in Morocco risk depleting our funds for such responses. We urgently need more money to help all the other cases we are being contacted about - virtually on a daily basis."

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