

Manifeste R

In light of the occupation of the Saint-Laurent Church on the 20th December 2014;
In light of the massive support of the « Nous désobéissons » (« We Disobey ») declaration, denouncing the criminalization of solidarity with migrants at risk of expulsion;
In light of the launching of a petition against the « Dublin » expulsions to Italy;
Because of the continuing expulsions in Italy and the expulsion of long-established migrants from Switzerland;
Because of the permanent harassment the authorities inflict on traumatised and exhausted people,

We, the undersigned, stand by our duty of hospitality. We support the occupation of the Saint-Laurent Church as a refuge for asylum seekers at risk of expulsion. We ask for:

1 A moratorium on all « Dublin » expulsions to Italy and on the expulsion of traumatised and ill people to other signatories of the Dublin Regulations.

The Dublin system has been increasingly questioned by organisations in the field. It has also been criticized by the High Commission for Refugees (HCR) and by the Commissioner for Human Rights for the European Council.

Arriving exhausted, hurt and often traumatised, migrants are forced to face the purely administrative treatment of their requests for help- any reasons for seeking asylum are ignored, as well as any other secondary reasons. People are routinely deported from state to state like unwanted baggage. This systemic ill-treatment shatters lives.

A recent judgement of the European Court of Human Rights declared that Switzerland violated the ban on torture and cruel and unusual treatment (art.3 ECHR) by expelling a family to Italy with no guarantees.

Despite this judgement, the Secretary of State for Migration continues to pursue the expulsion of asylum seekers, including families, to that country. In Italy, the lack of adequate infrastructure means that tens of thousands of migrants are forced to live in the streets; with no access to aid. According to the HRC (statistics from June 2014) only one refugee or asylum seeker out of four has access to a roof over their heads.

Andom, 27, fled both the dictatorship in Eritrea and his military service, which would have been for an indeterminate amount of time. He spent four years travelling, working to pay for his journey. Arrested and expelled by the Libyan authorities, he finally managed to cross the Mediterranean, and on the crossing he saw his travelling companions fall ill and get thrown overboard. Knowing the ordeal facing migrants in Italy, he did everything to avoid staying but didn't manage to avoid being fingerprinted. Because of this the Swiss authorities have put him on the register and forced him to stop his apprenticeship as a pastry chef. "Never in my life have I had peace of mind", says Andom. "Why won't the authorities in this country leave me in peace?"

Mikili, 23, endured prison and ill-treatment in Eritrea because he refused to keep a gun in his house. Like Andom, he crossed the desert to Libya. He «wept tears of blood» on the boat which was to take him to Europe and was about to capsize when its occupants were rescued by the Italian navy. Once in Italy he met homeless fellow countrymen and women. "I saw them sleeping outside and I don't want that to happen to me" he explains. But the young man was arrested a few hundred meters from the Swiss border. In the sinister «game» of the Dublin Regulation, Michele has lost and must return to his starting point in Italy. But he is willing to fight to stay in Switzerland, where he would like to finish school.

The Cantonal and Federal authorities must immediately cease all «Dublin» expulsions to Italy and, like many other countries, take advantage of the inherent flexibility of the sovereignty clause. We ask that the survivors of such horror as Andom and Michele have endured finally receive protection and the right of residence in Switzerland.

Abraham, 30, fled his military service in Eritrea. As a deserter, he is in danger of death and so took refuge in the Sudan, where he got married. Fearing kidnap by criminals based in the Sinai Desert, he decided to continue on his journey. In the hands of smugglers, he experienced a nightmare in Libya: thirst, hunger, extortion, beatings. Imprisoned, he managed to escape and cross the Mediterranean on an inflatable boat with 94 people crammed into it. Once he arrived in Italy, Abraham was able to escape the police and make it to Sweden with four compatriots. All were granted asylum but him- the Swedish authorities suspected him of being Ethiopian and not Eritrean. In Switzerland, Abraham's story was also ignored. Today, he risks being sent to Sweden despite the fact that he is traumatised and on medication for depression. «I have suffered violence, but the body heals. In the head, however, that violence is overwhelming, especially as they will not let me regain balance. At night, I'm afraid that the police will pick me up. Only faith allows me to keep going. «

Dinkenesh*, 29, has a long history as a political opponent in her country, Ethiopia, where the party in power has not changed for 24 years. For having signed a petition against the ethnic separatism policy advocated by the government, she was fired from her job as a school nurse. She then became active in an opposition party. After denouncing massive fraud, the young woman was imprisoned and beaten. Pregnant at the time, she lost her baby. Close to the «9 bloggers», nine bloggers and Ethiopian journalists charged with terrorism, eight of which are currently in prison, she managed to flee the country on a business visa for Holland. As she was travelling under the name of her ex-husband, whose parents are government supporters, she feared that he could force her to return to Ethiopia. At Amsterdam Airport, she immediately took a flight to Switzerland, where she was kidnapped and raped by smugglers. Dinkenesh suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. «If I have to leave again, I'm afraid of losing control. I do not have energy, I cannot even cry; I sometimes think of suicide. I have no home.» *Pseudonym.

In the application of the Dublin Regulations with other signatory States, the authorities must exercise discretion and refrain from expelling traumatised or sick people like unwanted baggage to countries that they often don't have any knowledge of. We ask the Swiss authorities to review their asylum application and to grant a right of residence to people who, like Abraham and Dinkenesh, need protection.

2 A policy of hospitality towards migrants fleeing war, dictatorship or misery

The Canton must stop all expulsions of people from countries plagued by war, dictatorial regimes or serious humanitarian and social crises. The SEM has absolute power over the lives of people who have no access to basic human rights, and thus decides to expel them to so-called "safe" countries (Nigeria, Congo-Kinshasa, Iran, Serbia etc.). They insist on taking a purely administrative perspective, and on ignoring all other essential aspects. We ask that the Canton assume its responsibilities and refuse to enforce measures that endanger the integrity and freedom of individuals.

This is the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in several international treaties ratified by Switzerland! The Convention against Torture prohibits expulsion to countries where serious violations of human rights are committed.

We ask that those individuals and families who have been seeking out a living for years in unbearable uncertainty, and who have been threatened with dismissal when they have done everything they could to rebuild their lives here, get a humanitarian permit (2). Men and women have been enduring the emergency help program for ten years in appalling, degrading conditions that compromise their integrity, their personality and those of their children!

The Refuge

The Refuge is fundamental to protect asylum seekers at risk of being expelled to a country which they have no connection with and where they fear physical injury. But this refuge is not just a place of welcome; a shelter for vulnerable people. Thanks to its public existence and mission as a meeting place, it aims to allow the people of Vaud to learn about the plight of people who have been living with us for many years and who have often suffered many tribulations.

It's the last remaining place that gives a voice to the requests of migrants and asserts their rights with the competent authorities.

We call on all people in solidarity to support us by signing the manifesto and national petition against Dublin expulsions (stoprenvois.ch/petition)!

(1) Dublin agreements stipulate that applicants for asylum must submit their application in the first member state in which they arrived. The Dublin regulations cover all states in the European Union.

(2) Permis B (art. 14, al. 2 Loi sur l'asile) ou permis F (art. 44, al. 2 Loi sur l'asile, cf. art. 83 Loi sur les étrangers)