

World Refugee Day Marked by 108 Million Being Displaced

Mediterranean tragedy involving the Greek coastguard typifies the burgeoning crisis which has its origins in United States wars and imperialist policies

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June 20th of every year is commemorated as World Refugee Day, an acknowledgment of those who have fled their countries of birth to seek relief from dangerous conditions which are human in origin as well as natural disasters.

During 2023, the number of refugees along with Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs) reached unprecedented levels as 108.4 million are designated by the United Nations as falling into these two categories.

The number of displaced persons today is twice as high as those dislocated at the conclusion of World War II. Many of the refugees and IDPs are suffering as a direct result of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) wars of regime change and occupation.

What is often not mentioned is the large numbers of refugees and IDPs from Ukraine which has been the focus of a proxy war waged by NATO against the Russian Federation over the last nine years. Since the beginning of the latest phase of the war on February 24, 2022, millions of Ukrainians and others living inside the country have escaped the fighting.

Figures given for the numbers of Ukrainian refugees exceed 8 million. Many have fled to neighboring Poland which is a military center for the NATO-backed war, providing a rear base for the training, arming and launching of Ukrainian troops into the battle against the Russian armed forces.

Other geopolitical regions impacted by the Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) destabilization programs are Syria, where Washington backed an insurgency against the government of President Bashar al-Assad beginning in 2011. Libya was the first full-scale project of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) which through the utilization of two United

Nations Security Council resolutions, blanket bombed the oil-rich state while deploying rebels to seize control of strategic urban areas and ports during the early months of 2011.

The Pentagon-NATO war against Libya killed anywhere from 50,000-100,000 people and displaced more than two million. The assassination of former leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi and the overthrow of the Jamahiriya political system led to the widespread proliferation of arms which were funneled to rebel groups, many of whom have their origins within U.S. intelligence.

Since the destruction of Libya under Democratic President Barack Obama, the previously most prosperous state in Africa has become a source for instability, factionalism and human trafficking. The thousands of people, including infants and children, which are trafficked across Libya and other North African states, represent the human by-product of a policy of imperialist militarism aimed at perpetuating the hegemonic control of the West over a majority of the world's population.

The June 13 Tragedy in the Mediterranean

There are approximately 500 people still missing after the capsizing of an unsafe vessel in the Mediterranean seeking to enter the European Union. 82 people have been confirmed dead while a small number of others were rescued by the Greek coastguard off the coast of Pylos.

Since the day of the disaster, there have been conflicting reports over the details of the tragic event. Spokespersons for the Greek Coastguard say that the vessel carrying an estimated 750 people refused assistance from their personnel.

This account has been disputed by refugee assistance groups and survivors of the mass drownings. Greek politicians and refugee advocacy agencies have condemned the role of the caretaker government of Prime Minister Ioannis Sarmas for not fulfilling their obligations under international maritime law to rescue vessels in distress.

There were reports of a rope being attached to the migrant's vessel in an effort to stir them out of Greek waters towards Italy. Initially, the Greek coastguard denied that this occurred, continuing to repeat its claim that the migrants did not want assistance and were heading to Italian waters.

[A report published](#) by the BBC revealed:

“One organization which provides support for migrants at sea, Alarm Phone, sent an email on Tuesday (June 13) afternoon warning the coastguard and others that as many as 750 people were on board and that they were urgently asking for help. Two accounts from survivors have suggested that tying a rope to the fishing boat may have led to it going down. One has come from a local councilor in the port city of Kalamata who had earlier spoken to a 24-year-old Syrian. ‘The coastguard boat tied them with some rope and tried to tow them to the left. For an unknown reason the boat veered to the right and suddenly sank,’ said Tasos Polychronopoulos. Another survivor gave a similar version to former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras during a visit to Kalamata on Thursday (June 15). ‘The Greek coastguard asked the vessel to follow them, but they couldn’t,’ a translator told Mr. Tsipras. ‘The coastguard then threw a rope but because they didn’t know how to pull the rope, the vessel started dangling right and left.’ ‘The coast guard

boat was going too fast, but the vessel was already dangling to the left, and that's how it sank.'

Nine people, including several Egyptians, have been arrested on suspicion of people trafficking, Greek TV is reporting."

Although the June 13-14 drowning of migrants was a profound example of the plight of those displaced by imperialist military as well as economic policies, such incidents have been taking place for nearly a decade. The U.S. and other EU-NATO states speak about the conditions of migrants and other displaced persons as if they have played no role in the crisis.

While in fact, the western industrialized nations are behind the growing instability across the Eurasian region and in Africa. In addition, the situation on the southern border between the U.S. and Mexico is prompted by the same imperialist policies of exploitation, destabilization and militarism.

Moreover, the existence of the migrant crisis caused by the Western states has provided a rationale for the ascendancy of ultra-right and neo-fascist groupings, political parties and governments in Europe, the United Kingdom and in North America. The influx of millions of non-white peoples into Europe and North America is fueling institutional racism and violence.

A Betrayal of the Refugee Convention and Protocol

In the aftermath of WWII, where tens of millions were killed in warfare and systematic genocide, the United Nations adopted the Refugee Convention in order to protect the people who have fled their countries, been displaced inside national borders or who remain stateless due to domestic and international injustices.

[According to the United Nations](#) statement in honor of World Refugee Day:

"Refugees are among the most vulnerable people in the world. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol help protect them. They are the only global legal instruments explicitly covering the most important aspects of a refugee's life. According to their provisions, refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreign nationals in a given country and, in many cases, the same treatment as nationals. The 1951 Convention contains a number of rights and also highlights the obligations of refugees towards their host country. The cornerstone of the 1951 Convention is the principle of non-refoulement. According to this principle, a refugee should not be returned to a country where he or she faces serious threats to his or her life or freedom. This protection may not be claimed by refugees who are reasonably regarded as a danger to the security of the country, or having been convicted of a particularly serious crime, are considered a danger to the community."

However, the failure to not only protect the rights of refugees but to regard them as a political tool to be manipulated by western states, clearly violates the letter and spirit of the Refugee Convention. There cannot be a reversal of this crisis without a concerted challenge to the military and economic policies of the imperialist states.

In reality, the more funding and arms sent to Ukraine will inevitably increase the number of refugees and IDPs. As long as the U.S. and other western states continue to support the

State of Israel against the Palestinians and other neighboring countries, there will be people who flee the area in search of safety and security.

The rising presence of AFRICOM and the French former Operation Barkhane has not brought any assistance to African governments in their quest to enhance their internal security apparatuses. Contrastingly, the level of instability in various states on the continent has worsened due to imperialist interventions.

Therefore, in order to end the crises of migration and internal displacement, the UN, mass organizations and political parties must oppose imperialist destabilization and military occupations. A world must be created where everyone has a right to decent housing, food, water, economic security and the right to full equality and self-determination.

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