

# Video sheds worldwide light on modern slave auctions in Libya

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.04.17

This month world leaders have been quick to voice outrage over video footage of Libyan **slave auctions**. **Activists**, however, raised the alarm months ago. Their warnings were not heard or noted.

Aid workers, human rights groups and experts say they had been shouting to bring attention to the war-torn North African country. They were trying to spread the word about sexual assault, torture and forced work affecting thousands of black Africans.

## *CNN Video Sparks Worldwide Outrage*

But it took CNN's footage of young Africans being auctioned off near Libya's capital, Tripoli, to force Western and African leaders into a flurry of criticism. The footage was filmed on a hidden camera and aired on November 14.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres was "horrified"; African Union chief Alpha Conde was "outraged."

France requested an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council. President Emmanuel Macron branded the auctions a **crime against humanity**.

But human rights groups and experts said these leaders are pretending to be surprised about the auctions.

## *"Everyone Knew About This ... Political Leaders"*

Hamidou Anne is an expert on African political issues. "Ordinary people aside, everyone knew about this — governments, international organizations, political leaders," Anne said.

Alioune Tine is Amnesty International's West Africa director. Hostage-takings, violence, torture and sexual assault were well documented in Libya, he said. "And we've been talking about slavery for a long time," he added.

In 2011, the fall of Libya's **dictator** Moammar Gadhafi tipped the country into chaos. The country became a major hub for sub-Saharan Africans setting sail for Europe.

## *European Countries Seek To Halt Migrants*

The European Union (EU) has been desperate to stop the flow of **migrating** people. More than 1.5 million migrants have arrived in Europe since 2015, according to United Nations (U.N.) figures.

But leaders are at a loss to find solutions for those who are seeking **asylum**.

This month the EU faced heavy criticism from the U.N. over its training of the Libyan coast guard. The U.N.'s human rights chief said the program resulted in **migrants** being sent back to "horrific" prisons.

## *"Unimaginable Horrors Endured By Migrants In Libya"*

With EU support, Italy has been training Libyan coast guards to stop boats as part of a deal that has seen **migrant** arrivals decrease almost 70 percent since July. Not everyone likes this deal.

The U.N. charges that the policy leaves **migrants** returned to Libya at risk of torture, sexual assault, forced labor and theft. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein is the U.N. human rights chief. "The international community cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the unimaginable horrors endured by migrants in Libya," he said.

The EU has hit back that its coast guard training has helped save lives. Nearly 3,000 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean this year. Meanwhile, EU aid has helped U.N. agencies send 10,000 migrants home from Libya voluntarily.

### ***"In Libya, Black People Have No Right"***

In Gambia, in West Africa, Karamo Keita set up a group to warn fellow youngsters not to attempt the trip to Europe. On his own attempt to reach Europe, he suffered horrific abuses in Libya including slave labor.

"In Libya, black people have no right," he said back in September. "We were taken to various farms where the Libyan guy sold us as slaves. We worked on the farms for free."

A group of migration experts had in April reported the existence of markets where **migrants** became "**commodities** to be bought."

Joanne Liu is the head of medical charity Doctors Without Borders. She wrote an open letter to European governments warning of the thriving kidnapping, torture and theft business. She asked if European governments were ready to accept that their efforts to stop migration also made those migrants targets for torture, slavery and sexual assault. "We can't say we didn't know about this," she said.

### ***Enough Blame To Go Around***

Amnesty International's Tine said that in its efforts to stop migrants arriving "at all cost," Europe bore "a fundamental responsibility" for the horrors in Libya. Yet others are also to blame, he said. "African countries do nothing to make their young people stay, to give them work," he said.

Expert Hamidou Anne also said an poor response from African leaders was in part to blame for the unfolding disaster. He said widespread racism in the Northern African Maghreb countries, where Libya is found, makes it worse. "This cannot go on," he said. "Faced with a **crime against humanity** you don't condemn it, you act."

### ***Rwanda Offers To Take 30,000 Africans From Libya***

Since the news broke, the tiny country of Rwanda, in East Africa, has offered to take in 30,000 Africans from Libya.

Migration commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos meanwhile said on Thursday that the EU was working hard to find solutions.

Tine said slavery needed to be on the agenda at a European-African summit on November 29-30 in West Africa's Ivory Coast. Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou suggested this idea earlier as well.

Tine called for an "investigation to see how the trafficking is organized and who is behind it." And, he added, "everyone must take their responsibilities."