

Press Release

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European states should respect advice by UNHCR

Strasbourg, 16.06.2010 – "Advice by the authoritative United Nations refugee agency is nowadays not sufficiently respected by governments and state agencies in Europe. UNHCR strong recommendations have simply been ignored in a number of recent cases" said the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, publishing today his latest [human rights comment](#).

On 9 June 2010 the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom took part in an action coordinated by the EU agency Frontex to expel 56 Iraqi men, whose asylum claims had been denied. An enforced removal was arranged to Baghdad. This action went against [UNHCR](#) advice to continue granting international protection to asylum seekers originating from certain areas in Iraq, including the capital.

The Commissioner is very concerned at the policy of intercepting and returning migrants who are attempting to reach European shores without offering them any possibility to seek asylum. "Inter-governmental agreements with Libya have given this country the role of protecting European countries against the arrival of migrants across the Mediterranean, irrespective of these people's needs.

"By forcing people back to countries where they are at risk of ill-treatment or deportation to other countries that are unsafe for them, European states violate human rights. The situation has become even worse after UNHCR was ordered last week by the Libyan authorities to close its office. The agency will therefore be unable to provide any protection to the persons brought back there unless Libya reconsiders its position with respect to UNHCR's presence."

Commissioner Hammarberg calls on governments to closely cooperate with UNHCR, stressing that "not doing so endangers human lives and risks undermining an international protection system which is badly needed today more than ever."

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