



PRESS RELEASE

Human Smuggling and Trafficking on the Horn of Africa - Central Mediterranean Route

8 February 2016, Addis Ababa/Nairobi: Irregular migration to Europe from the Horn of Africa is dominated by highly integrated transnational organised criminal networks. A new report jointly requested by the governments of Ethiopia and Sudan, and prepared by IGAD's Security Sector Program (IGAD SSP) and Sahan Foundation, describes the hazards of this migratory route and reveals how this dangerous and illicit trade is organised.

The route from the Horn of Africa via Libya to Europe is especially perilous. Migrants risk abandonment in the desert, kidnapping for ransom by criminal gangs, and abduction or execution by militias affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). And those who attempt the sea crossing between Libya and Italy are almost 30 times more likely to die at sea than a migrant or refugee traveling the waters between Turkey and Greece.

As Europe struggles to manage its largest migrant crisis since the Second World War, attention has focused largely upon the refugee flows from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. But in 2015, an estimated 154,000 migrants entered Europe via the Central Mediterranean Route – a dramatic increase over previous years – most of them from the Horn of Africa. By far the largest contingent of migrants – nearly 39,000 in 2015 – is from the region's second smallest country: Eritrea.

“The kingpins who dominate this illicit trade are predominantly Eritrean in nationality, but they collaborate with ethnic Somalis, Ethiopians, and Sudanese in order to be able to operate easily across borders,” says Commander Tuemay Aregawi, Head of IGAD SSP's Transnational Organised Crime Pillar. “These networks extend far beyond this region, across Europe, where some of the proceeds of this crime are laundered, and some of them also operate in places like Dubai, Singapore, Hong Kong and the United States.”

Although Somalia, Ethiopia and other countries of the region also produce migrants, Eritreans constitute a disproportionate percentage of the exodus to Europe. This new report therefore identifies some of the key Eritrean nationals involved in smuggling and trafficking, the degree to which they are able to operate in Eritrea, and their reliance on the services of Eritrean diplomats abroad.

As the primary countries of transit for migrants from Eritrea and Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan are central to international efforts combating human smuggling and trafficking in the region. Both have introduced new measures to combat human smuggling and trafficking, including joint operations along their common border, but there is a need to both to enhance this bilateral cooperation and to expand it to include other governments and intergovernmental bodies – especially in the domain of law enforcement.



“There are limits to what the countries of this region can achieve without cooperation from concerned governments in Europe, as well as intergovernmental bodies such as EUROPOL and INTERPOL,” says Matt Bryden, Executive Chairman of Sahan. “The EU should assign a higher priority to cooperation in law enforcement and criminal justice measures, and the UN Security Council should also consider applying sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for human smuggling and trafficking in Libya.”

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