

US: Don't Forcibly Transfer Migrants to Libya

Deportations Would be Unlawful, Subject Detainees to Horrific Conditions

(New York) – The [United States](#) should not forcibly transfer migrants to [Libya](#), where inhumane detention conditions are well-documented, including torture, ill-treatment, sexual assault, and unlawful killings, Human Rights Watch said today. Based on [numerous](#) media [reports](#) citing US officials, the Trump administration may be poised to imminently deport an unknown number of detained migrants to Libya. A US judge [ruled](#) that the government cannot immediately proceed with deporting people to Libya.

The Tripoli-based [Government of National Unity](#) (GNU) and its [Foreign Ministry](#) issued statements denying reports of a deal with the Trump administration. Its rivals, the Eastern-based Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), and its affiliated [Foreign Ministry](#) also issued [statements](#) refuting claims of a deal. When asked about the plans, US President Donald Trump [said](#): “I don’t know.”

“It is dystopian to strong-arm a fractured country like Libya with a well-documented history of horrific detention conditions by unaccountable armed groups to take in more detainees,” said [Hanan Salah](#), associate Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Libya’s ill-treatment of migrants is notorious, its detention centers are hellholes, and refugees have nowhere to turn for protection.”

At the request of immigrant [rights advocates](#), a US federal judge on May 7, 2025, [ruled](#) that any effort to deport migrants to Libya would “clearly” violate a prior court order barring officials from swiftly deporting migrants to countries other than their own without first weighing whether they would face persecution. [Court filings](#) say that Trump administration officials gave detainees held in a center in Texas oral notice and in at least one case paperwork to sign notifying them of their expulsion to Libya. They [include](#) nationals of the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, and Mexico.

Human Rights Watch has for two decades [documented](#) inhumane conditions and serious abuses in migrant detention centers and prisons in Libya. Most are controlled by abusive, unaccountable armed groups. Such violations include severe overcrowding, beatings, torture, lack of food and water, forced labor, sexual assault and rape, and exploitation of children.

Human Rights Watch and other groups have also documented pervasive long-term arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances of both men and women, killings under torture, and unlawful killings in places of detention.

The abuses and violations of detainees’ rights are systematic and widespread, and the United Nations has [said](#) they amount to crimes against humanity. Major humanitarian organizations including UN agencies and experts do not have regular access to Libya’s prisons and detention centers.

Every annual report on human rights practices in Libya published by the [US State Department](#) since at least 2011 highlights patterns of abuse against migrants and refugees, including arbitrary detention, abduction and kidnapping, inhumane detention conditions, and torture and ill-treatment by armed groups and criminal gangs.

[Libya’s judiciary](#) is fragmented and overwhelmed, with a lack of adequate judicial review and due process rights. Armed groups and quasi-security forces who control detention facilities do not always carry out release orders or comply with court summonses of detainees.

Deep divisions persist in Libya with two the rival authorities vying for control. The GNU, appointed as an interim authority through a UN-led consensus process, and affiliated armed groups control western Libya. Their rivals, the LAAF and affiliated security apparatuses and militias, control eastern and southern Libya. A civilian LAAF-affiliated administration is known as the “Libyan Government.” Armed groups and security agencies operate detention facilities across the country, while the GNU Justice Ministry exercises nominal oversight over prisons.

GNU-affiliated security forces in March conducted raids in several western cities including Tripoli, [violently arresting](#) migrants and refugees amid a resurgence of discriminatory and racially motivated statements by authorities in both the eastern and western parts of the country. The Tripoli Internal Security Agency on April 2 further [escalated](#) its repression, [shutting down](#) the headquarters of 10 international nongovernmental organizations that provided support to migrants and refugees.

One court [filing](#) also references a Lao detainee verbally informed that he would be imminently removed to Saudi Arabia on a military flight. Human Rights Watch has documented Saudi Arabia’s [deplorable](#) rights record for years, including detention [conditions](#) migrants have experienced such as torture, beatings, serious allegations of deaths in custody, and extreme overcrowding, as well as past cases of [torture](#) and [ill-treatment](#) of Saudi detainees.

The Trump administration has [used](#) the Alien Enemies Act as a run around basic due process and human rights protections to carry out mass deportation of migrants, including to remove at least 137 Venezuelan men to El Salvador, where they are being held arbitrarily, indefinitely, and incommunicado in a [notorious prison](#).

It has [carried](#) out mass expulsions of 299 third-country nationals to Panama, subjecting them to harsh detention conditions and mistreatment, while also denying them due process and the right to seek asylum. It has also summarily [expelled](#) 200 third-country nationals, including 81 children, to Costa Rica.

The European Union and member states are already complicit in serious violations against migrants and asylum seekers intercepted at sea and sent back to Libya. Their continued cooperation with abusive and dangerous Libyan Coast Guard forces, providing [supplies](#), technical support, and [aerial surveillance](#) to help them intercept Europe-bound migrants at sea, has increased the crisis. Migrants and asylum seekers who are returned to Libya by these abusive forces are detained arbitrarily and face the risk of serious harm.

Collective summary expulsions from the United States would violate international law. There is no provision in Libyan law to detain a third-country national deported from the United States. Detention of migrants in Libya is also arbitrary and violates due process rights because there is no remedy or right to appeal. Libya is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no asylum law or procedures whatsoever.

“Expelling people to countries known to have appalling detention conditions shows the Trump administration’s utter disregard for due process,” Salah said. “Expelling people to Libya would raise the question of whether there is any country on earth where the Trump administration would not send someone.”