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Amnesty International Report 2017/18 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Malta

New information emerged regarding the 2013 shipwreck in which many Syrian refugees died. It exposed Italy's reluctance to assist Maltese authorities in rescuing the boat in distress. Malta denied three Libyan asylum-seekers who were rescued within its search and rescue region permission to disembark. The authorities admitted 168 asylum-seekers under the EU relocation programme, a higher number than they had committed to. Marriage rights were extended to same-sex couples. Abortion remained prohibited in all circumstances.

Background

In October, journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was killed in a car bomb explosion. She had been critical of the government and investigated organized crime, corruption including against politicians, and the Maltese chapter of the so-called “Panama Papers” – leaked files from an offshore law firm regarding tax havens and their users. The government was under pressure from the EU and others to ensure a thorough and independent investigation into Daphne Caruana Galizia's death. In December, three men were charged with her murder and remanded in custody.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

In May, the Italian magazine *L'Espresso* published new information regarding the shipwreck that occurred on 11 October 2013 in the Maltese search and rescue region of the central Mediterranean. Over 260 people died, mostly Syrian refugees, many of them children. The magazine reported that phone conversations held in the period immediately preceding the capsizing of the refugees' boat showed that Italian navy and coastguard officials were reluctant to deploy the Italian warship *Libra* which was the closest to the boat in distress, notwithstanding repeated requests by Maltese authorities to do so. Criminal proceedings and investigations against some of the Italian navy and coastguard officials involved were ongoing in Italy at the end of the year. No investigation was known to have been initiated by the Maltese authorities into the incident.

In August, Maltese authorities denied authorization to disembark three Libyan asylum-seekers from the rescue boat *Golfo Azzurro*, operated by the NGO Proactiva Open Arms. The three men had been rescued within Malta's search and rescue region in the central Mediterranean. After three days of negotiations between Malta and Italy over which country should take the asylum-seekers, Italy accepted the request and the three men were taken to Sicily.

Malta received 168 refugees and asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy, more than the 131 it legally committed to accept under the EU relocation programme, which closed on 26 September.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

In July, marriage equality legislation was approved by Parliament. The new law extended full marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Abortion remained prohibited in all circumstances. Women were denied access to abortion even when the life of the pregnant woman was at risk.

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