

**MALTA: THE EL HIBLU THREE**

**YOUNG REFUGEES FACE LIFE SENTENCES**

Three teenagers, one from the Ivory Coast and two from Guinea, were among a group of migrants who fled Libya on a dinghy trying to reach Europe on 26 March 2019. The dinghy ran into trouble, and 108 people were rescued by the crew of an oil transporter, El Hiblu. Following the order of the European authorities, the crew sought to return the rescued people to Libya, where refugees and migrants face arbitrary detention, torture and exploitation.

**The conditions for refugees in migrants in Libya have been known for years, but still the European Union and member states continue with policies trapping refugees and migrants in a vicious cycle of cruelty, including detention, torture and exploitation.**

**Refugees and migrants in Libya, including children, live in constant risk of being arrested or abducted by security forces, members of militias, armed groups, traffickers and criminal gangs. Many have experienced torture in official detention centres or facilities run by armed groups or traffickers; have been held for ransom; or have been forced to work for little or no money.**

**Despite this, the European Union and member states continue to provide resources to the Libyan coastguard and border control agencies to intercept people and force them back to Libya.**

**EU states have also withdrawn many rescue ships from the Mediterranean and, where private vessels rescue people, have directed distress calls to Libyan authorities so that people are returned there.**

**Read more in Amnesty’s report ‘**[***Between life and death’: Refugees and migrants trapped in Libya’s cycle of abuse***](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/3084/2020/en/)***.***

People began to panic when they realised they were being returned to Libya, some crying out that they would rather die, and a protest broke out. During the protest nobody was hurt and nothing was damaged.

The Chief Officer asked what he could do to calm people. The teenagers acted as interpreters and mediators, defending the rights of the rescued people not to be returned to face the appalling conditions for migrants in Libya.

The crew of the El Hiblu were convinced to turn the ship towards Europe. However, as it entered Maltese waters, the Maltese authorities stormed the ship and arrested the teenagers (aged 15, 16 and 19), claiming they had hijacked the vessel. They were taken to a high security unit and then spent 7 months in prison before being released on bail in November 2019, pending trial. They face serious charges of terrorism and if found guilty, they could be given life sentences, despite the lack of evidence to support the charges. They had simply tried to protect themselves, and those rescued with them, from danger in Libya.

**TAKE ACTION:**

**Write to the Attorney General of Malta calling for the charges against the El Hiblu Three to be dropped.**

**You can also send a message of support and solidarity to the three teenagers as part of the** [**Write for Rights campaign**](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2020-10/W4R%202020%20booklet%20FINAL%20singles.pdf?w9awfSN_pTf8a6bkk1pBob1HN13zGkDu=)**.**

**TEMPLATE LETTER**

The Attorney General

The Palace

VLT 1115 – Valletta

Malta

Email: ag@gov.mt

Your Excellency,

I am writing to urge you to drop all charges against the teenagers known as the ‘El Hiblu 3’ and close the case.

These young people, two of who were just 15 and 16 years old at the time of the alleged incident, could face life imprisonment for opposing their return to suffering and torture in Libya. However, there is a lack of evidence to support the serious charges against them.

The three young people had acted as interpreters on the El Hiblu, an oil transporter, to help preserve their lives and those of their fellow passengers after they were rescued at sea.

Please deliver justice in this case by dropping the charges and closing the case.

Yours sincerely,

**El Hiblu 3**

**PO Box 39**

**Ħamrun**

**Malta**

**SOLIDARITY ACTION**

**You can send the El Hiblu 3 a message of solidarity as part of the Write for Rights Campaign.**

***Language:* English or French**

***Suggested Message:* Justice for The El Hiblu 3. We stand with The El Hiblu 3.**

***Send your message to:***

***Please don’t send a religious card or include your name and address.***