



HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION
SOUTH AFRICA

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HRA Chairman Saad Kassis-Mohamed Calls on Libya to Release Cameroonian Nationals Held in Arbitrary Detention

Yaoundé | June 2026

The Human Rights Association (HRA) today calls on the Libyan authorities to release immediately all Cameroonian nationals held in arbitrary detention across Libya's network of militia-controlled detention facilities, to end the systematic extortion, torture, and forced labour to which detained Cameroonian nationals are being subjected, and to cooperate fully with United Nations mechanisms for the protection and voluntary repatriation of those who cannot safely return home. The HRA estimates that approximately 4,000 Cameroonian nationals are currently present in Libya, a significant proportion of whom are held in conditions of arbitrary detention or are at immediate risk of abduction and detention by militia forces or criminal trafficking networks operating with the knowledge and in some cases the active participation of Libyan state-affiliated actors.

The HRA's review of documented cases confirms that Cameroonian nationals transiting or residing in Libya face a documented and systematic pattern of arbitrary arrest, detention without due process, and severe abuse. Libyan security forces, coast guard units, and militia groups conduct raids in residential areas, markets, and transit routes, detaining sub-Saharan African nationals on the basis of nationality alone. Those detained are transferred to official and unofficial detention facilities — many under the effective control of armed groups — where they are held indefinitely without legal recourse, subjected to beatings, forced labour, and extortion, and denied access to food, water, and medical care. A February 2026 review of documented cases covering the period from January 2024 to December 2025 characterises the system as an exploitative model that has become a brutal and normalised reality — detention used not as a migration management tool but as a revenue stream.

The HRA has reviewed accounts from Cameroonian nationals who have experienced these conditions directly. Emmanuel, a Cameroonian man in his late twenties who had been working in Tripoli, was detained by militia forces during a neighbourhood raid and held for eleven weeks in a facility in the city's outskirts. He describes being beaten daily for the first two weeks of his detention, denied medical treatment for a wound sustained during his arrest, and forced to contact his family in Cameroon to arrange a ransom payment before his release. Christelle, a Cameroonian woman detained after a coast guard interception at sea, was transferred to a detention centre in western Libya where she was held with more than two hundred other women and girls in a single room. She describes witnessing repeated sexual violence and states that detainees who became seriously ill were removed from the facility and not seen again. Both individuals left Libya following their release and neither has received any form of acknowledgement or remedy for what they experienced.

The HRA notes that the conditions described by Emmanuel and Christelle are consistent with the broader pattern documented across Libya's detention system. As of late 2025, more than 12,000 people were being held in 27 prisons and detention facilities across Libya in conditions the United Nations has described as a matter of grave concern. Libyan forces intercepted or rescued more than 25,000 migrants and asylum seekers at sea between January and November 2025, returning them to



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Libya where they face the same cycle of detention and abuse they had attempted to flee. The criminal networks operating these facilities have not been prosecuted. The armed groups responsible for the worst abuses operate with effective impunity. The International Criminal Court has confirmed active investigations into crimes committed in Libya, and the Libyan General Prosecutor announced in November 2025 the arrest of a former judicial police commander subject to an ICC arrest warrant for crimes against humanity. The HRA notes that these steps, while necessary, have not translated into protection for the Cameroonian and other African nationals currently held in Libya's detention system.

HRA Chairman Saad Kassis-Mohamed stated: "Emmanuel was arrested walking home from work. Christelle was pulled from a boat. Neither had committed any offence. Both were held for months in conditions that no legal system in the world would sanction. What is happening to Cameroonian nationals in Libya is not immigration enforcement. It is the organised exploitation of people who have nowhere to turn, run by criminal networks that profit from the absence of any rule of law. Libya has an obligation under international law to release those it holds arbitrarily, to prosecute those responsible for torture and forced labour, and to end the extortion system that treats detained human beings as a source of revenue. The HRA calls on Libya to discharge that obligation without further delay."

"Libya's detention system does not operate in isolation. It is sustained in part by agreements with European governments seeking to prevent migration across the Mediterranean. Those governments bear a share of the responsibility for what Cameroonian nationals are experiencing in Libyan detention. Funding a system of arbitrary detention, torture, and extortion in order to keep migrants away from European shores is not a migration policy. It is the outsourcing of human rights violations."

Saad Kassis-Mohamed, Chairman, Human Rights Association

The HRA calls specifically on the Libyan authorities to release immediately all Cameroonian nationals held in arbitrary detention across Libya's official and unofficial detention facilities; to end the use of detention as a revenue-generating system and to prosecute those responsible for torture, forced labour, sexual violence, and extortion committed against detained Cameroonian nationals; to grant United Nations agencies and independent monitors unimpeded access to all detention facilities in which Cameroonian and other African nationals are held; to ensure that Cameroonian nationals who have been intercepted at sea are not subjected to forced return to detention but are referred to appropriate protection mechanisms; and to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court's active investigations into crimes committed against migrants and refugees within Libya's territory.

The Human Rights Association is an initiative of the WeCare Foundation, Cape Town, active across Africa, South Asia, and the Gulf region. The HRA works to protect the human rights of individuals facing unjust detention, denial of medical care, and due process violations, and engages directly with United Nations mechanisms to advocate on their behalf. For more information, visit wcrfoundation.com/human-rights-association.