

***Niamey, Niger, December 9 (Infosplusgabon) - The United Nations migration agency and the Government of Niger have welcomed the first 504 people from Libya to Niger, kicking off a voluntary mass evacuation of nearly 4,000 migrants.***

“After the discussions at the [African Union-European Union] summit in Abidjan, the government has demonstrated its commitment to making this evacuation a priority and a reality,” Alberto Preato, the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) Programme Manager, declared on Friday.

Organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Niger with the Embassy of Niger in Libya, and under the initiative of President of Niger Mahamadou Issoufou and Prime Minister Brigi Rafini, the migrants registered for voluntary return at Niger Embassy in Tripoli.

On Wednesday, the first of eight charter flights carrying 504 migrants, including women and young children, arrived at the Diori Hamani International Airport in Niamey, a UN statement said.

IOM is providing technical and logistic support for the registration, profiling, reception and onward transportation of the returning migrants, under the MRRM financed by the European Union.

“The success of the operation is a stepping stone in strengthening the partnership between IOM and the Government of Niger,” said Mr. Preato.

The migrants were received by the Ministers of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Health and Humanitarian Action, along with more than 50 IOM staff – including from operations, protection, medical, logistics, finance, reintegration and communication – and other senior officials.

In addition to welcoming the returnees, IOM registered, profiled, provided them with food and water, and facilitated transportation to their villages of origin.

The UN migration agency and Niger are also exploring possibilities for the socio-economic reintegration of migrants arriving in the weeks ahead.

After the successful reception of the first charter last night, Niger’s Foreign Minister officially confirmed plans for seven additional charters – carrying 500 migrants each, one per day, from Wednesday onwards – to transport the total 3,850 Niger migrants now registered in Tripoli.

Mohamed Bazoum, Niger's Minister of Interior praised the fruitful partnership with IOM, and complimented the Organization for making possible the dignified return of Nigerien migrants under the best possible conditions.

In close collaboration with IOM staff in Libya, the mission in Niger is preparing to receive additional groups of migrants now in detention centres across Libya.

Meanwhile, IOM staff in Agadez are now assisting the 10th convoy of migrants arriving from Algeria as they prepare themselves for possible mass evacuations of stranded migrants from its northern borders.

"IOM is proud to be part of this operation and to be able to bring back hope to those who had long lost it," Mr. Preato concluded.

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