

Urgent Appeal: UN experts call on the Netherlands to give homeless migrants emergency help before Christmas

GENEVA (16 December 2014) – A group of United Nations human rights experts today urged the Dutch Government to immediately provide homeless irregular migrants in the Netherlands with emergency assistance, such as food, clothing, and shelter (popularly called ‘bed, bath and bread’ in the country). The Netherlands refuses to provide emergency assistance to this group, despite repeated disapproval by international and regional human rights bodies.

The Dutch central Government recently denied an appeal for help from over 60 local municipalities for 15 million euro in budget support to fulfil their responsibilities towards migrants in need during the coming winter months. The central authorities leave it up to municipalities and local charities, on an ad-hoc basis, to decide whether or not to provide assistance to irregular migrants who live on the streets.

“In these dark days before Christmas, it is appalling that the Dutch government will not even commit less than 0,01% of its yearly budget to help people living in absolute misery and poverty,” the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, said.

“Assisting migrants living on the streets is not a matter of charity: access to emergency assistance is a right and the Government of the Netherlands is under an international legal obligation to provide it,” Mr. Alston noted.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Leilani Farha, underscored that “under international human rights law the Netherlands must provide emergency shelter without discrimination. This means, emergency services such as homeless shelters, and adequate housing alternatives, must be made available to migrants, regardless of their legal status in the country.”

“A number of municipalities want to provide emergency housing for this population. The central government must provide the means for municipalities to do so. Forcing the most vulnerable people into homelessness during the harshness of winter is particularly egregious.” Ms. Farha added.

“The Netherlands is under an obligation to ensure a basic right to emergency shelter and adequate housing alternatives, especially for children, as party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child,” Ms. Farha said.

“Politicians in the Netherlands have been trying to score political points at the expense of homeless irregular migrants in the national debate about immigration,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau. “But providing basic emergency assistance is a matter of international obligation, not of political expediency.”

“Human migration patterns will not change by letting migrants sleep on the streets,” Mr. Crépeau warned.

The European Committee of Social Rights, a body that oversees the European Social Charter, recently decided in two separate cases that the Netherlands is violating the right to emergency assistance of adult homeless irregular migrants. This is not the first and only time that the Committee and other international, regional and national human rights bodies have criticized the country for failing to meet its obligations to irregular migrants.

“Instead of taking immediate action, the Dutch government announced it will do nothing until a Committee of European Ministers will formally endorse the mentioned decisions somewhere in 2015,” the UN experts noted. “We urge the Dutch central authorities to act now, as winter sets in soon.”

The mandate-holders have been in contact with the Dutch government to clarify this situation.

ENDS

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