

Politics

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Libya Alert: GNU's ISA suspends ten international NGOs from operating in Libya on April 2; effort to transfer accountability

Current Situation:

- The Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU)-affiliated Internal Security Agency (ISA) announced on April 2 that ten international NGOs operating in Libya had been “closed”.
- In addition to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the following Western organization have been suspended from operating in Libya: International Medical Corps, Danish Refugee Council, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), CARE, InterSOS, ACTED, CEZVI, Terre des Hommes, and the Norwegian Refugee Council.
- The ISA claimed that these organizations were involved in “hostile” activities, including facilitating the settlement of irregular migrants in Libya, and engaging in smuggling and money laundering.
- A report citing a March 27 letter written and signed by mainly European diplomats indicated that the ISA had questioned at least 18 staff members from six international NGOs, seized some of their passports, and forced some of them to resign and made them pledge to never work for an international NGO again.

Source: [ISA](#)

Assessments & Forecast:

1. This comes amid heightened tensions in Libya surrounding the issue of irregular migration stemming from the country's role as a major point of origin for Europe-bound irregular migration. On March 8, the GNU met with the Head of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Mission in Libya. This meeting prompted public backlash as it was perceived as pertaining to the resettlement of irregular migrants in Libya. Although the GNU dismissed such claims, this continued to fuel resentment among segments of the Libyan population as seen by anti-migrants protests in Zawiyah and Tripoli on March 11 and March 22 respectively. More recently, a report by a US-based newspaper on April 2 indicated that the US was "looking" for countries that would take in the migrants it is deporting, and that Libya was one of the countries that had been approached.
2. Based on the ISA statement, these NGOs have been accused of operating in violation of Libyan laws and of providing services to irregular migrants. Although the ISA's claim regarding the extent of the "hostile" activities carried out by these organizations is dubious, through this crackdown, it likely seeks to project its opposition to all alleged migrant resettlement plans. By transferring accountability and portraying the issue of irregular migration as originating from external actors like NGOs, the ISA likely seeks to alleviate anti-GNU sentiment.
3. **FORECAST:** Over the coming days, the ISA is likely to crackdown further on international NGOs in Tripolitania. This may also include the temporary detention of local employees, and potentially the cancellation of licenses and contracts granted to these NGOs. This is liable to prompt criticism from western countries. However, given European countries extensive cooperation with the GNU on the issue of irregular migration, this development is unlikely to significantly strain ties between the two sides.

Recommendations:

International NGOs or affiliated groups operating in Libya are advised to remain cognizant of this announcement due to the increased likelihood of further crackdowns on their operations in Tripolitania in the coming days.