The Door Closes

Contributed by Pita Ochai
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Muammar Gaddafi, Libyan leader, shuts the door against migrants using the country as transit to Europe
Libya, the north African country, which was once the gateway for illegal African migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe is no longer an easy transit route. The government has intensified efforts to stop the treacherous coastal journey to Europe. Aside the deportation and sometimes execution of illegal migrants found guilty of contravening the country’s law, Muammar Gaddafi, Libya president, recently ordered the closure of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, UNHCR, office in Tripoli, Libyan capital. To him, UNHCR is illegal and has encouraged the illegal migration of Africans.The absence of the UN commission means that migrants including asylum seekers would no longer have acess to helping hands if they run into trouble in their efforts to cross from Africa to Europe. The commission had been of assistance to such migrants when discovered and most of whom are often deported to their country of origin.The closure of the UN commission was condemned by different human rights groups in Europe, but the European Union, EU, seems to welcome Gaddafi’s action as the body refused to officially come out with an open condemnation of it. Adrianus Koetsenruijter, EU ambassador to Libya, said the presence of the UNHCR in Libya has attracted more refugees to Libya who later find their way to Europe in search of better living conditions. “There’s a certain fear in the country that with the presence of the UNHCR, more refugees are being attracted to Libya. This is causing a bigger problem inside the country,” he said.Just days after Gaddafi’s government announced the closure of the UNHCR, as if to show appreciation for his efforts to help curb the illegal migration to Europe, the EU, signed a $60 million financial and technical co-operation pact with Libya as a prelude to a wider deal expected to be sealed by the end of the year. The deal is to enable the EU continue to help finance tighter border controls.The recent action of the Libya government is gradually making it an ally of the west in curbing human-trafficking syndicates who are believed to be the main target. Before now, the EU signing of the financial and technical co-operation pact with Libya was an unthinkable package. Libya had been referred to as a pariah state accused of failing to curb immigration, promoting terrorism that threatens western interests and to adopt western-styled democracy and human right values. On Gaddafi’s part, he had, in the past, accused European countries of undermining African sovereignty and trying to re-colonise the continent.Lawrence Hart, head, international organisation for migration, IOM, Libya, said the country was becoming a dead end for migrants hoping to reach Europe illegally. “As it stands, it is a dead end for illegal migration, not down to zero, but down by 95 percent of landings in Italy and Malta. We should thank this country exercising the restriction,” he said. The restrictive actions may not solve the menace of illegal African migration to Europe if the root causes which are poverty and hunger are not addressed. “It’s always a precarious situation because it can burst anytime, until the root causes are addressed, migration flows are likely to continue for many reasons,” he said.Melissa Fleming, UNHCR spokesperson, said that the commission was not given any reason by Libyan authorities why they were asked to leave the country. She said the problem between the UNHCR and Libyan officials is rooted in their different approaches on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. The Libyan government views majority of those who claim they are refugees as economic migrants. She said UNCR does not encourage illegal migration but was out to handle refugee and asylum system in the country. “If we leave, it will leave a huge vacuum for the thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who are there already and, of course, those who continue to arrive steadily on boats,” she said. About 9,000 refugees mainly Palestinians, Iraqis, Sudanese and Somalis and more than 3,700 asylum seekers mainly from Eritrea are under the care of UNHCR in Libya.Last week, when the UNHCR was being asked to leave the country, a situation that should call for their stay occurred on the Mediterranean Sea. On Monday, June 14, a vessel containing women and children got into distress but was only rescued 24 hours after the UN sounded alarm. Such distress from now would be under the mercy of Gaddafi’s security agents if ever discovered.According to the UN statistics, every year more than 40,000 migrants cross the Sahara on their way to Europe. Most of those who attempt to cross are believed to be doing so due to economic reasons but some are political refugees fleeing conflict and persecution in places like Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia. The IOM statistics shows that in 2008, Tunisia had the highest rate of migrants to the country en route Europe with 6,800, while 6,000 Nigerians and 4,000 Somalis arrived Lampedusa, the coastal town of Libya on their way to Europe. According to the Nigerian Immigration Services, more than 15,000 illegal Nigerian migrants have been deported from Libya in the past five years while attempting to pass through the country to Europe. In September 2009, more than 734 Nigerians were deported in just four days from the North African country. Still a Waiting Game In PolandPita Ochai Poles would have to wait for a second round election on Sunday, July 4, to know their next president. None of the presidential candidates scored enough votes to be declared winner of the Sunday, June 20, election held in the country. Bronislaw Komorowski, acting president, came first in the final election result, but his score was not high enough for an outright win. He won 41.22 percent of the total votes cast while Jaroslaw Kaczynski, twin brother of Lech Kaczynski, Poland’s late president, scored 36.74 percent. Both candidates failed to meet the Poles electoral commission laws which require that a candidate must score 50 percent of total votes to be declared winner of the election. The country’s general election was earlier scheduled for August this year but the death of Lech and 96 others in a plane crash in April this year, necessitated its rescheduling to June 20, to enable the country install a democratically elected leader. Those died in the plane crash included many of Poland’s political and military leaders. That incident overshadowed the election campaign and made it one of the country’s least aggressive polls in recent times. Before the plane crash, Jaroslaw was one of the least trusted politicians in Poland. As a former prime minister, his government policies antagonised the neighbouring countries like Germany and Russia, before he was voted out of office in 2007. In the last

election, Jaroslaw appeared to have maintained his core support of socially conservative voters, and won over others by presenting himself as a changed man, prepared to compromise with opponents, in the wake of the death of his brother, the former president. Komorowski’s campaign was on gender equality and state-funding for some deadly illnesses. He also promised to further unite the country if made the president. He is from the same Civic Platform Party as Donald Tusk, Poland’s prime minister so, many voters believe that a win for him would ease the tension between the president and prime minister as witnessed in the past. Ex-Rwandan Army Boss Survives Assassination Attempt Six suspects believed to have shot Faustin Nyamwasa, Rwanda’s former army chief of staff, in an attempted assassination have been arrested by the South African police. Govindsamy Mariemuthoo, South African police spokesperson, announced the arrest last week. He refused to disclose the nationalities of the suspects but assured the world that more arrests would be made in the next few days with more revelations coming from their investigations.Nyamwasa was attacked while returning from a shopping trip at about midday on Sunday, June 20. He used to be a close confidant of Paul Kagame, Rwandan president. During the Rwandan genocide, Nyamwasa played a very important role in the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front, RPT, led by Kagame. But the two parted ways when Nyamwasa accused Kagame’s government of corruption. He also claimed that the Rwandan judiciary was compromised as it had become Kagame’s property. The claims did not go down well with the Rwandan government and Nyamwasa had to flee into exile along with other top military officers for safety. The Rwandan government immediately reshuffled the military leadership while others who were close to Nyamwasa were put under house arrest. The Rwandan government also accused Nyamwasa of being responsible for a grenade attack in Kigali this year and had previously made attempts for his extradition.Rosette Nyamwasa, Nyamwasa’s wife who was in the car during the attack, accused the Rwandan government of being responsible for the attack. She said Kagame had boasted to Rwandan parliament that he would kill her husband. Louise Mushikiwabo, Rwandan foreign minister, denied Rwanda’s connection with the attempted murder. “The Rwandan government does not condone violence. We have requested that South Africa government should investigate the shooting thoroughly,” he said.