

F R E E 
ELHIBLU 3

Free the El Hiblu 3 – dismiss the trial immediately! Resisting illegal push-backs to Libya is not a crime.

Appeal to stop the criminalisation of three young migrants in Malta.

In late March 2019, a rubber boat with 108 people on board, was escaping the Libyan coast and trying to reach Europe. Co-ordinated by an airplane of the Eunavfor Med operation, the people in distress were found and rescued by the merchant vessel El Hiblu 1.

During the rescue the captain of the El Hiblu 1 reassured the people that they would reach a port of safety in Europe. Following the order of European authorities, the crew tried to return them to inhumane conditions in Libya, from which they had just escaped.

When the rescued passengers realised they were being returned to Libya, they began to protest. Collectively they were able to prevent being pushed-back. The crew re-directed the El Hiblu 1 and steered north towards Malta.

Nobody was injured during this protest, nothing was damaged. When the Maltese military stormed the vessel in Maltese territorial waters, they expected “pirates” or “terrorists”, but they only met humans who were seeking help and hoped for a safe place.

Three of the 108 rescued passengers – 15, 16, and 19 year-old teenagers – were arrested as the ring leaders of the protest and accused of several crimes, including terrorism. They were immediately detained, taken to a high security unit, and then imprisoned in Malta for seven months. They were eventually released on bail in November, 2019.

Having been released on bail, the three have to register every day at the police station. They continue to face a severe prison sentence if they are found guilty of the charges. Clearly, the Maltese state is trying to make an example of the three, in order to deter others from similarly resisting push-backs to Libya.

The three teenagers were acting as translators and mediators during the protest on board. Their imprisonment and prosecution constitutes a deep injustice. Instead of being prosecuted, the “El Hiblu Three” should be celebrated for their actions in preventing the return of 108 precarious lives to Libya.

As signing organisations and groups, we demand the immediate dismissal of the trial.

We agree that protesting illegal push-backs to Libya is not a crime.

We demand the end of all illegal returns to Libya and mass human rights violations resulting from Europe’s collaboration with the so-called Libyan coastguards.

We will continue to work toward corridors of solidarity and the fair relocation of refugees and other migrants in welcoming cities all over Europe