



## News : December 30, 2008 | Demographics

### Italy Deporting Immigrants Immediately

**Italy will send back illegal immigrants starting from Tuesday, after an unexpected wave of arrivals around Christmas overwhelmed its holding centers.**



#### Unwelcome Arrivals

Migrants rest in the holding center on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa off the southern coast of Italy (Photo: Reuters)

Thirty eight Egyptians will be flown to Cairo on Tuesday, the first group to be deported under the new plan announced by Italy's right-wing government which has made cracking down on illegal immigration a top priority since coming to power in May.

Interior Minister Roberto Maroni, a member of the anti-immigration Northern League, said Italy faced an emergency after some 2,000 immigrants arrived on the southern island of Lampedusa since Christmas. "I have arranged for the activation of a centre suitable for identification and expulsion," Maroni told Italian radio.



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A spokeswoman for UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, said the move raised the risk of "generalized expulsions" and appealed to the government to respect the rights of immigrants.

"It is important, even in an emergency situation, to guarantee information on their rights and allow all those who express an interest in seeking asylum to be transferred as soon as possible to the appropriate centers," Laura Boldrini told the ANSA news agency.

Italy's long shoreline and proximity to Africa make it a popular entry point into Europe for thousands of desperate migrants who set sail in rickety, crowded boats each year, many perishing along the way.

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The number of illegal migrants who have arrived on Italian shores nearly doubled in the first seven months of the year, prompting Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's government to declare a nationwide state of emergency in July.

editor: Reuters

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