



RSMMS ¹ release of the delegation's mission to Agadez on migration – 16/18 October 2017

AGADEV, 18 October 2017

The steering committee of the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Trade Union Migration Network (RSMMS, in its French acronym) met in Tunis in July 2017 and agreed, in the framework of its 2017-2020 programme, to send a mission to Agadez in order to meet with migrants in their search for a job. The mission was joined by representatives of ITUC Africa (International Trade Union Confederation) and OTUWA (Organization of Trade Unions of West Africa) and was supported by the PROMIG-FES project of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Tunis office).

The RSMMS network, aiming at assisting migrants in their journey and integration, felt it necessary to meet them in order to dialogue with them and with the related stakeholders (local authorities, people's representatives, NGOs, smugglers etc.)

After having dialogued with the different groups and having listened to many migrants, the delegation came up to the following statements:

Under the pressure of the European Union and of some of its members, some African countries, like Niger, decided to toughen their policies in order to halt migration. Niger law 036/2015 made foreigners migration illegal, in contradiction with the ECOWAS agreements, nevertheless being its member. Such repressive policies didn't at all succeed in stopping migrants, but made their journeys more difficult, risky and violent.

Migrants going north now avoid Agadez, where they risk being arrested and sent back to the country of origin. They stay in the desert, suffering further, subject to merciless smugglers and bandits who more and more often abandon them.

If they manage to get to Algeria or Libya to cross the country or to work there, these migrants have no access to any right and risk at any moment to be sent back to the Niger border deprived of all their goods and income, if they managed to work. Such systematic

¹ French acronym: Réseau Syndical Migrations Méditerranéennes Subsahariennes ; English: Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Trade Union Migration Network

practices are possible thanks to widespread corruption of large sectors of local authorities and employers.

Deported from these countries and left in the middle of the desert they are collected by the IOM, whose mission is basically to accompany them back to their country of origin. Those who do not agree to go back are abandoned to themselves.

The political choice of criminalising migration has catastrophic repercussions, first of all on migrants who are subject to increased risks and spend more money profiting gangmasters and are obliged to go back to their homes before departing again paying more money and suffering more.

Such security measures harm local populations of the towns located on the migration routes. This is the case of Agadez, a landmark in the desert whose economy has been historically connected to the transit of travellers and goods. Now unemployed, several transporters turned themselves into smugglers and adopted criminal behaviours. EU funds which would allow former smugglers to turn to other jobs are awaited since more than a year. In any case the whole economy of the Air region is in distress. This situation where most of the population has become poor (except for gang masters networks) risks causing xenophobic reactions against migrants who are not seen as a source of income but as a burden which they are now unable to manage anymore on their own.

The RSSMS delegation – against the backdrop of this dangerous and ineffective policy adopted by the EU and several African governments – affirms that it is urgent to abandon this approach exclusively based on security (for Europe, not for migrants). In order to decrease the level of violence against migrants, the violation of rights, the disproportionate expenses, the broken lives it is utmost important to encourage legal migration channels. This is how migrants and local populations who seem them pass could find peace again and reconnect to economic development, now in the hands of criminal gangs.

This repressive and inhuman approach is also hypocrite as migrants go where work is. It is then unacceptable to use their workforce and reject them at all times when they cannot enjoy from their rights.

This mission further strengthened the conviction of RSMMS members that it is urgent to restore policies that are based on migrants' rights. RSMMS will support the right to a decent human rights based migration not only among its members, but also towards public officials, employers and citizens at large in their countries but also at regional and interregional level.

For RSMMS, the members of the delegation and representative of ITUC Africa and OWATU