

France to Destroy 'Jungle' Refugee Camp in Calais



Paris, September 5 (RHC)-- France has vowed to raze the "Jungle," a sprawling camp in the northern port city of Calais hosting refugees waiting to cross into the UK. French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve made the pledge at a press conference in Calais following a meeting with local officials.

The refugee camp will be "completely dismantled," Cazeneuve said, adding: "I want the closure of the camp as quickly as possible." The French interior minister also told the regional newspaper Nord Littoral that he would press ahead with the closure of the camp "with the greatest determination" and destroy the site in stages. He further announced plans to create accommodation for thousands of asylum seekers elsewhere in the country "to unblock Calais."

Meanwhile, Calais' mayor Natacha Bouchart said that she had received assurances from Cazeneuve that the camp would be dismantled "in one go," noting, however, that no date had been set for the operation.

In February and March, French authorities dismantled the southern half of the refugee camp, which is situated around the Channel Tunnel, the undersea passage into Britain.

According to local authorities, some 7,000 asylum seekers are living in the remaining northern half of the camp, up from 4,500 recorded in June. This is while humanitarian groups put the number of those residing in the refugee camp at around 9,000.

Refugees' attempts to make their way through the Channel Tunnel or to stow away aboard trucks have disrupted traffic in the area and forced French police to maintain a large deployment there.

Local lorry drivers, shopkeepers and farmers are expected to stage a blockade of Calais on Monday to demand the camp's closure. The Calais camp is grappling with problems such as overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions and food shortages. Charities have warned that they no longer have enough donated food or money to feed the growing population of the Jungle.

The situation in Calais is part of a wider refugee crisis across Europe, which has been struggling with its biggest influx of asylum seekers since World War II, as people flee conflict-ridden zones in Africa and the Middle East.

Many blame major European powers for the unprecedented exodus, saying their policies have led to a surge in terrorism and war in the violence-hit regions, forcing more people out of their homes.

More than 278,320 asylum seekers have reached Europe via the Mediterranean so far this year, while over 3,170 people died or went missing in their perilous journey to the continent, according to the latest figures by the International Organization of Migration.

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