

31/05/2019

## "I HEARD MY FRIEND SHOUTING FOR HELP, BUT THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO TO PROTECT HIM FROM THE BEATINGS"

**Date and time:** May 31, 2019 03:00

**Location:** Bogovolja, Croatia

**Coordinates:** 45.07021084363311 , 15.751034937935515

**Push-back from:** Slovenia, Croatia

**Push-back to:** Croatia, Bosnia

**Demographics:** 8 person(s), age: 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 33, 35 , from: Syria, Iraq

**Minors involved?** Yes

**Violence used:** beating (with batons/hands/other), electric shock

**Police involved:** 10 Slovenian police, Slovenia police jeep, 2 Slovenia police cars, 2 Slovenia police vans; 8 Croatian police, 1 Croatian police van

**Taken to a police station?:** yes

**Treatment at police station or other place of detention:** detention, personal information taken, papers signed

**Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?:** Yes

**Reported by:** Border Violence Monitoring

### ORIGINAL REPORT

On May 21, a group of eight individuals from Syria and Iraq (ages 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 33 and 35 years old) departed from Velika Kladusa (BiH) at 10:00PM. They took a 20 minute taxi ride to the border and crossed the border into Croatia around 10:30PM. They walked until 7:00AM and slept in the forest until 7:00PM on May 22. They continued walking through the forests in Croatia for three more days like this, walking at night and taking rest during the day.

On the fourth day, the group waited at the meeting point for a taxi that would transport them to the Slovenian border. Two taxis arrived at 11:00AM on May 25 and the eight individuals split into two groups of four and rode in the taxis until 5 kilometers before the Slovenian border. They spent the next three days walking in the forest in Slovenia, but their food supply ran out.

"We were so hungry we ate the leaves from the trees."

On May 28, the group had made it to the forest around Kostanjevica na Krki (SLO) and were waiting at the second meeting point for their scheduled taxi. They waited one day, but the taxi never arrived and the group decided to leave the forest and walk down to the village to find someone who could help them. They found a Slovenian man who gave them chocolate, bread and cigarettes and told them to walk to a larger village 20 kilometers away and catch a bus to Ljubljana from there.

As the group started walking along the road towards this village, two Slovenian police officers (one male, one female, both around 30 years old) arrived around 3:00PM on May 29, driving what was reported as a black jeep with an open back. The respondent reported that these officers were very kind. They searched the belongings of the group then two police cars and two police vans arrived with eight police officers present. The police separated the individuals into two

groups with four persons in each van and drove them approximately twenty minutes to a police station.

The respondent reported that they were put into a garage next to the police station around 4:00PM. Inside the garage there were 30-40 beds and all of them were full. The garage was cold and all of their clothes were wet. There were many police at this garage and they checked the people one-by-one. They took their phones and put them in a bag with a number on it and wrote the number on each person's hand (their phones were eventually given back to them). They were given food after two hours. The group reports that they tried to ask for asylum but the translator present did not translate this request. They wrote down their personal information (name of father, mother, age and place of birth) and signed papers.

After 24 hours, around 3:00PM or 4:00PM on May 30, the group was put into one police van and taken what the respondent believed was the Croatian border. Two Croatian police officers (one female in her 30s, one male in his 50s) wearing a dark blue uniform led the group into a small room at the police station where the group was held for 4-5 hours. The room had five other men from different countries (Yemen, Syria, and Iraq). There was one toilet, one bed and one window with thick glass. The police checked their names, took the documents they received from Slovenia, and told the men to remove their belts and shoe laces.

The police release the men from the room around 9:30PM and order them into one police van, which was driven by two male police officers. The respondent did not see their faces to report on their ages or appearance. They drove approximately two hours in the van.

Once they arrived at the Croatian/Bosnian border, near the town of Bogovolja (HR), the police separated the eight individuals into two groups of four. One officer places a stone on the Croatian border line and another stone on the Bosnian border line. In between was "no man's land." Four additional police officers are there and they are wearing Baklava face masks and holding batons. A man with a "hard voice" told the first group to go and the four people ran through "no man's land" to reach the "safe zone" in Bosnia while the four officers swung their batons at them as they ran.

"Two minutes [felt like] five hours"

When the first four arrived in Bosnia, they heard the officer shout "Go" for the second group. One man from this group fell down in "no man's land." The respondent could hear his friend screaming, but said there was nothing he could do to help him. For two minutes the four officers beat the fallen man with batons and electric shocks. They eventually let him go and he joined the rest of his group on the Bosnian side of the border.

The group walked twelve kilometers from the border to a benzine station and a man at the station calls them a taxi which took the group to Bihac (BiH), where they arrived at 5:00AM on May 31.