

01/12/2018

"WHEN YOU RUN, SOMEONE HIDES AFTER THE TREES [AND HITS YOU IN] THE FACE IN THE TEETH IN THE KNEES"

Date and time: December 1, 2018 08:00

Location: Zdihovo, Croatia

Coordinates: 45.42274362662195 , 15.221098060070403

Push-back from: Croatia

Push-back to: Bosnia

Demographics: 7 person(s), age: unknown , from: Syria, Iraq

Minors involved? Unknown

Violence used: beating (with batons/hands/other), kicking, insulting, gunshots, destruction of personal belongings, theft of personal belongings

Police involved: Five officers

Taken to a police station?: no

Was the intention to ask for asylum expressed?: No

Reported by: No Name Kitchen

ORIGINAL REPORT

On the night of November 28, 2018, the respondent left together with a group of six of his friends by foot from Velika Kladuša. They crossed the border to Croatia with the intention of walking to Slovenia and then continuing to Italy. All of them were Kurdish, some from Syria, some from Iraq. Although the weather conditions were quite bad from the start, the group walked for three days.

"We left at night, the first night we are sleeping in an empty building and [then] walking three days, three days raining and snowing. The river was like freezing. Very bad weather. Two from my group [looked like they] were going to die from cold because we were wet."

At 3 am on the third day the seven of them entered an empty building in a forest next to a road to shelter from the cold. Some cars saw them entering and the respondent supposes, that those might have been the ones informing the authorities. Shortly after the group entered, several officers approached the building and shot three times into the air. The seven of them remained silent.

"We are silent when police is coming, when they were shooting. They say 'Go! Go! Go!' we didn't do anything."

The officers didn't enter the building and eventually ended up leaving. Still, it seemed that they were aware, or suspicious, of the presence of people in the house. Despite the respondent's insistence to leave, the group decided to stay for the night.

"We must change this place, the police know where we are."

Ultimately, however, the group stayed in the house because they were so cold and so wet that they saw no other option. Two officers returned to the house around 8 am.

“The police return in the morning, when the light comes, they saw footprints and broke the door down. Two police at first show up, they broke the door. Later they brought a police van which had one officer and two police in the van. They took everything, mobiles, power bank.”

They broke down the door to their house, made contact with the group, and then called for backup which arrived in the form of a van and three more officers. The respondent recognized one officer who had caught him twice before, but this officer didn't recognize him. Their phones, money, and power banks were taken and never returned. Afterwards, they had to enter the van.

The head officer spoke first with the respondent, then with the others, asking:

“Who speaks English?”

So the respondent replied with yes. The officer then announced that he was a Croatian police officer and that the seven of them were arrested because they had crossed the border illegally. As a result, they had to enter the van to go to a police station where they would be brought to a prison.

“I told him no problem we just need warmth.”

The seven of them were still freezing, but contrary to what the officer had told them, they didn't take them to a police station.

“We go to border directly.”

After the group entered the van, they were driven directly to a secluded section of the Bosnian-Croatian border, at approximately 1 pm. After they arrived, the seven of them were taken out of the van in pairs, just the last three had to get off together.

“Then just two by two they take us out of the van and close the door. Loudly.”

The respondent was part of the last three and immediately after he left the van, he was being beaten with batons and witnessed one of his phones being destroyed by an officer. However, he had managed to hide another phone in his dirty sleeping bag. One of the group members had €150 stolen from him, however the respondent himself was able to keep his money hidden in his underwear. While around eight officers were present during the push-back, only four or five of them committed violence against the group. All the latter wore black balaclavas.

“The masks were special for commandos, like when I worked for Americans in Iraq”.

The three officers who drove them to the border didn't actively participate in the violent push-back.

“They just [stood] by laughing at us.”

“When we get out of the van, one stood here with a baton and said ‘Don't come another time motherfucker’ and raised a baton behind his head with two hands and brought it down with full force.”

What made it even more difficult for the seven of them to escape to the Bosnian side of the border was the snow covered, slippery ground. The respondent also lost his shoes in the snow.

“With all of the snowing, you cannot run fast.”

While running back he discovered more officers hiding behind trees, chasing the people on the move in the direction of the border.

“When you run, someone hides after the trees [and hits you in] the face in the teeth in the knees.”

One of his friends from Iraq, had his nose broken at this point.

“When you are running, someone hides [and] after three meters and then starts hitting you. When you are down in the earth, someone kicks you.”

The last officer the respondent encountered before entering Bosnian, unlike the others, was unmasked.

“He was very big and muscular like Dwayne ‘the Rock’ Johnson.”

He was around 180 cm tall, 35-years-old, had green eyes, white skin, and was clean-shaven except for a mustache.

“He hits you just on the head, just on the face.”

The respondent described having an interaction with this officer centered around his frustration and confusion with his violent treatment:

“I told him, ‘Why? We are all human’ and he hit me. My friends who were already in the forest watched me as I did this. I told him, ‘I am not scared of you, I am just a refugee, I won’t kill anything I won’t steal anything’. He told me, ‘You get out, motherfucker’. He was scared of me, he was scared of us.”

The respondent had attempted to cross Croatia several times before but explained that this was his first time experiencing violence of such magnitude at the border:

“It was the first time they hit me like that, but I’ve seen so many people with broken teeth, broken eyes.”