

10/01/2019

## "WE WOULD MELT THE SNOW TO DRINK THE WATER"

**Date and time:** January 10, 2019 10:00

**Location:** Rijeka, Croatia, close to the Slovenian border, North of Rijeka

**Coordinates:** 45.48557232451277 , 14.431723724835592

**Push-back from:** Croatia

**Push-back to:** Bosnia

**Demographics:** 13 person(s), age: unknown , from: Syria, Morocco, Algeria

**Minors involved?** Unknown

**Violence used:** beating (with batons/hands/other), insulting, water immersion

**Police involved:** Croatian officers, caught by three (in olive green uniforms, with rifles and a white van, maybe army officers), violating at police station several officers and on the border 6 officers (with black masks)

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

**Treatment at police station or other place of detention:** detention, photos taken, papers signed, no translator present, denial of food/water

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

**Reported by:** No Name Kitchen

### ORIGINAL REPORT

The group of 13 men from Syria, Morocco and Algeria left Bihać (B I H) on January 2 , 2019, and crossed the Croatian border . From there, they walked for three days through the mountains .

*"We were severely constrained by the cold and snow ."*

After passing the mountains, the group of 13 continued walking for five more days. They were poorly equipped for the weather and ran out of food and water quickly.

*"We could not eat because we could not carry food for ten days."*

At some point, they even started eating snow to hydrate themselves.

*"We would melt the snow to drink the water."*

*" We would share all things, even one packet of ramen between me and four others."*

At most all their shoes and socks were soaked with water by the eighth day of the journey.

As the 13 individuals came closer to the Slovenian border, their ordeal increased due to the presence of many Croatian authorities in the forest they were moving through at that point.

*” There were a lot of police on the road and we sat to wait for the police to go to continue along the road and it took us a long time like this and there was difficulties to sit and difficulties sleeping from the severity of the cold.”*

On the ninth day of their journey , January 10 at around 10 am, when they were somewhere close to Slovenian border north of Rijeka (HR V ), they were apprehended by three Croatian officers. They wore olive green uniforms and carried long rifles , similar to M-16s. The respondents describe that these officers who initially stopped them were kind and did not treat them unfairly.

Shortly after being apprehended, the group of 13 was loaded into a white van and driven for approximately one hour to a police station in Rijeka. The respondents report that there was a drastic change in the way that they were treated by the officers in the station, compared to the once that apprehended them first. At the station, they were physically harmed and detained for a long period in a van parked at the station.

*” We were arrested by the army and handed over to the police. There was no one who could speak English. They beat us at the police station in Rijeka. [The police officers] put us in the car for six hours without food or water.”*

Upon their initial capture by the Croatian authorities, several individuals expressed their intention to claim asylum in Croatia. The officers explained to them that they would be able to request asylum. Nonetheless, upon reaching the police station in Rijeka, each individual’s asylum requests were either ignored or denied. Four of the Syrian individuals expressed their intention to claim asylum in Croatia, but were told by the officers:

*“ You need a passport to prove you are from Syria .”*

The others, who were from North African countries, were told by the officers that there was no opportunity for them to claim asylum in Croatia.

While at the police station, the group members had their photos taken individually and were made to sign a document in a language they didn’t understand. When one of the respondents resisted the demand to sign this document, he was being violently intimidated to do so.

*“ I told them I don’t speak English and he grabbed me by the head and punched me.”*

The respondents then were brought with a van to the Bosnian border at approximately 5 pm the following evening. They arrived to a secluded section of the Bosnian-Croatian border close to the Maljevac (HRV) border checkpoint at approximately 8 pm. There were six officers wearing balaclavas waiting for them. The 13 individuals had to get off the police van and had to walk one by one through two parallel lines of officers. As they moved through, the officers hit them with batons. One of the respondents describes being hit on his head by a baton.

The last officers in line then pushed them towards a stream, marking the border between Bosnia and Croatia. When they reached the water, they were pushed by an officer into it. The water was waist-high and cold.

Finally, around 10.30 pm, they were pushed-back to Bosnia.