



Trial against alleged Eritrean trafficker ‘Walid’ will start in The Netherlands on 3 November

Substantive hearings are about to begin in Zwolle, the Netherlands, in the important case against Eritrean national Tewelde Goitom (also known as “Walid” / “Welid”). The hearings are set to run across the month of November. Walid is accused of leading an international criminal network that detained, tortured, raped and extorted Eritrean refugees in Libya. The network operated detention camps, mainly Bani Walid in Libya, where survivors were held and tortured until families in Europe paid ransoms of thousands of US dollars. Walid is accused of perpetrating systematic human rights abuses against those in his control. Thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of mostly Eritrean refugees have been trafficked by Walid. The Dutch prosecution [links hundreds of victims](#) in the Netherlands to the network and has charged multiple co-accused. A total of [191 witnesses](#) have been heard in this case.

The hearings can be followed at the court in Zwolle, The Netherlands, or through livestream (Dutch, English, Tigrinya): <https://streams.nfgd.nl/onderzoek-pearce-grootschalige-mensensmokkel>

Arrest and extradition of Walid and Kidane

Walid was [arrested in March 2020](#) in Ethiopia together with another well-known trafficker, Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam (“Kidane”). Both men are from Eritrea originally. Together, they held and tortured thousands of refugees, the majority also from Eritrea, and extorted them for ransom.

Walid was [found guilty on five counts of smuggling and trafficking in Ethiopia](#), and was then extradited to The Netherlands to stand trial for his crimes in Libya.

Although Kidane initially managed to escape from the court in Ethiopia, he was later [re-arrested in Sudan](#) on 1 January 2023. He stood trial in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for [money laundering](#). The UAE reportedly agreed to extradite Kidane to The Netherlands and he may be called upon as a witness during the trial of Walid.

Pro-forma hearings

The pro-forma hearings in the Walid-case have been ongoing since January 2023. Early on during the hearings, Walid was further accused of attempting to [tamper with witnesses](#) and trying to obtain a false ID.

The Eritrean community, among whom survivors of Walid’s torture, have been present in the court in large numbers. On 5 July 2024, the Eritrean community organised [a large demonstration](#) in front of the court in Zwolle against the human trafficking of refugees and the long arm of the Eritrean regime. Among others, they called for more protection for the survivors, many of whom are [afraid to come forward](#).

Number of refugees and migrants in Libya

The [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\) estimates](#) that there are almost 900.000 refugees and migrants currently residing in Libya. Libya is [not party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees](#) or its 1967 Protocol, so refugees face a lack of protection. This irregular situation for refugees and migrants contributes to the proliferation of human trafficking networks, trapping victims in a [continuous cycle of abuse](#), according to research.

Torture in Libya

Walid was allegedly leading a criminal network in Libya approximately between 2014 and 2018, which mostly trafficked Eritrean refugees. This involved the transportation of Eritrean refugees to Libya, where they are detained in remote locations, and then threatened and tortured. While being tortured, they have to call their families to beg for ransom. Human trafficking for ransom has been called [enslavement](#). The torture includes extreme violence such as beatings, burning, torture with molten plastic, being tied up in extreme stress positions, and electric shocks, all while being detained with thousands together in dark warehouses with little food and no basic needs.

Researchers estimated that between 2016 and 2021, over [100,000 Eritrean refugees travelled through Libya to reach Europe](#). [Researchers also estimated](#) that between 2016 and 2021, the payments from families of Eritrean refugees alone generated over USD 1 billion.

Human trafficking in Libya continues

Walid and Kidane are not the only human traffickers active in Libya; [researchers have found](#) a network of mostly Eritrean top level traffickers, working with Libyans, who operate the torture network. Human trafficking for ransom [continues in Libya](#). Not only Eritrean refugees, but also other refugees and migrants, including from Ethiopia and Sudan, are targeted. The international investigation that led to the arrest of Walid and Kidane continues to look into the criminal network in Libya.

International investigation

As a result of an international investigation called 'Pearce' with cooperation between among others The Netherlands, Italy, the International Criminal Court and Interpol has led to the arrest of Walid, Kidane and 5 other agents cooperating with them in The Netherlands.

The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (KMar) called upon survivors that made the journey to Europe via Sudan and Libya between 2014 - 2024 to [get in touch and testify](#), as the investigation into the criminal network continues.

The Eritrean community in The Netherlands

There are around [28.000 people with an Eritrean background](#) in The Netherlands. The Dutch prosecution has linked [hundreds of Eritreans](#) in The Netherlands to trafficking networks, with many more survivors likely to be off the radar. Most of the asylum applications in [The Netherlands in 2025](#) were done by Eritreans, many of whom came through Libya. In The Netherlands and elsewhere in the diaspora, Eritrean asylum seekers continue to face pressure from the Eritrean regime. According to [a report presented to the Dutch parliament](#), Eritreans in the diaspora are threatened and coerced to pay 2% tax and other financial contributions and face transnational repression - including surveillance, threats, targeted violence, arrest or detention of relatives back home, in efforts to silence critics of the ruling Eritrean party.

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Hearing programme

Livestream: <https://streams.nfgd.nl/onderzoek-pearce-grootschalige-mensensmokkel>

3 November	The identity of the suspect
4 November	The cases victims on the boat that arrived in Lampedusa on 1 august 2015.
5 November	The cases victims on the boat that arrived in Augusta on 17 December 2017. The cases victims on the boat that arrived in Augusta on 28 December 2017. The cases victims on the boat that arrived in Pozzallo on 12 March 2018.
11 November	The cases victims on the boat that arrived in Messina on 4 February 2018. The cases victims on the boat that arrived in Messina on 24 April 2018.
17 November	The subject 'criminal organization' and; The personal circumstances of the suspect; Exercising the right to speak.
18 November	Reserve day
19 November	Indictment
24 November	Plea
26 November	Reply Rejoinder Final word of the suspect

Additional Sources:

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