

July 18, 2013 6:09 pm

UN condemns Italy's deportation of mother and child

By Guy Dinmore in Rome



Mukhtar Ablyazov, fugitive Kazakh banker

UN human rights experts have condemned Rome's "unlawful" deportations of the wife and child of a fugitive Kazakh dissident, saying the expulsions amount to an "extraordinary rendition" in a case that has threatened the stability of Italy's coalition government.

In a statement released by the UN office for human rights in Geneva, three special rapporteurs called on Italy and Kazakhstan on Thursday to reach an agreement on the "rapid return" to Italy of Alma Shalabayeva, wife of Mukhtar Ablyazov, and her six-year-old daughter Alua.

Condemnation by the UN of the way Italy handled the May 31 deportations is likely to fuel a debate due to be held in the Italian Senate on Friday ahead of a vote of no-confidence called by opposition parties against Angelino Alfano, the interior minister and number two in Silvio Berlusconi's People of Liberty party.

Mr Berlusconi's party has warned it will bring down the coalition government it formed with the centre-left Democrats in April if Mr Alfano is ousted. Democratic party leaders have decided not to support the no-confidence motion, but the UN report is likely to strengthen the resolve of a group of party rebels who have demanded Mr Alfano's resignation.

"The circumstances of the deportation give rise to the appearance that this was in fact an extraordinary rendition, which is of great concern to us," said the UN experts.

The report noted that Ms Shalabayeva was married to Mr Ablyazov whom it described as a former political prisoner and political opponent of President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. The report said he was granted political asylum in the UK in 2011 but fled after UK police warned him his life was in danger.

"Ms Shalabayeva and her daughter were legal residents in the European Union and living in Italy when they were expelled," the report said, accusing Italy of violating guarantees of due process and depriving the mother of her right to appeal against deportation and to apply for asylum.

The report said Italian authorities "appeared to have ignored concerns that Ms Shalabayeva might be at risk of being persecuted, tortured or subjected to other forms of ill-treatment upon her forcible return to Kazakhstan due to her husband's political activities".

Italy's coalition government, led by the centre-left prime minister Enrico Letta, revoked the deportation orders last week after an internal inquiry.

Mr Alfano told parliament on Tuesday that he had not been informed of the deportations. However, his chief of staff, who resigned over the affair, said he had told Mr Alfano that the Kazakh embassy in Rome had requested that Italian police arrest Mr Ablyazov who was suspected of being in the city in late May.

Mr Ablyazov – who denies charges in Kazakhstan of bank fraud, involvement in an organised criminal group and money laundering – was not there when Italian police raided a Rome villa on the night of May 28. Police instead arrested his wife and accused her of being an illegal immigrant, which she denied. She and her daughter were deported two days later on a private jet chartered by the Kazakh embassy.

Police deny she repeatedly requested political asylum and said they were unaware her husband was a political refugee.

Earlier on Thursday, Giorgio Napolitano, Italy's head of state, stepped into the fray by warning the nation's political parties not to risk triggering instability that would damage confidence on international markets.

"The damaging effects on our international relations and on financial markets would be seen immediately and could be impossible to recover from," said Mr Napolitano.

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