

Fascist mobs terrorise migrants in Cyprus while police turn blind eye

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Migrants on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus have been subject to pogrom-type attacks by fascist groups. The political groundwork for these attacks has been laid by the governments of the European Union (EU), which have whipped up hostility to migrants month after month.

The pogroms have taken place over a two week period while police and riot cop squads, known to be hotbeds of far-right activity, turned a blind eye.

The attacks were instigated by members of the far right Elam organisation (National Popular Front, also known as the National People's Front). But they began when the authorities cut off the water and electricity supply to an apartment complex where Syrian refugees live in the village of Chlorakas, near the western resort of Paphos. This provocative, inhumane act was carried out in scorching 40-degree heat.

The refugees were then evicted from the complex. *Al Jazeera* described “a police sweep” carried out “to evict dozens of refugees allegedly living there illegally.” This was authorised even though the migrants—as noted by KISA, the Cyprus-based anti-racist NGO—“have been permanently and legally settled in Cyprus for years.

The August 21 operation was ordered by President Nikos Christodoulides in a meeting “with the attorney general, ministers of interior and justice, deputy welfare minister, undersecretary to the president and police chief.”

The *Cyprus Mail* noted that under the order, “The migration department will begin noting down all asylum seekers who have been living in the contentious Ayios Nikolaos apartment bloc in Chlorakas.” Government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis said that those deemed to be legally in Cyprus would have to find another place to live, and in the interim would be sent to the Kofinou immigration detention centre, the newspaper reported, and “Those living here illegally will be arrested and deported immediately.”

As refugees protested their persecution, they were confronted over two nights (August 27-28) by a mob of racists and fascists who on the second night declared they were leading an “anti-ghettoisation” demonstration. On the first night, at least 1,000 fascists “splintered into smaller groups that began attacking foreign nationals living in Chlorakas,” reported the *Cyprus Mail*.

It added, “Businesses owned by migrants saw their shop fronts smashed and vehicles overturned.

“One Cypriot resident charged that a group of thugs broke into a home with seven children and their mother and began breaking things inside the house.

“Another elderly Cypriot man said they were warned that Elam members may ‘punish’ locals who chose not to participate in the protest.”

Video footage from Monday night showed around 250 Greek Cypriots chanting “get out, get out,” marking the second night in a row of racist attacks against foreign nationals living in Chlorakas. *Cyprus Mail* reported, “Earlier on Monday, a group of some 500 Syrian residents held a peaceful demonstration, as a reaction to the previous night’s violent attacks against them. Shop windows were smashed and migrants beaten and threatened.”

Of an initial 21 arrested, there were more migrants and refugees detained (12) than there were fascists (9). This was despite the police chief, as reported by *Al Jazeera*, telling “state broadcaster CyBC on Tuesday [August 29] that the clashes began when Greek Cypriots attempted to assault the migrants and refugees.”

President Christodoulides authorised more police to be flooded into the area. Tensions were whipped up, with Christodoulides’ press officer Victoras Papadopoulos pandering to fascist sentiment with the comment, “Since the day the government took over [in February 2023], it has been tackling immigration and illegal migration in every way possible. Arrivals have been reduced by half,

returns have increased and applications are being processed twice as fast.”

These policies saw asylum claims drop from 10,600 during the period March to July 2022, to just 4,976 in the same period this year. This represents a doubling down on the anti-immigration policies of the previous government under Nicos Anastasiades, whose interior ministry declared the Chlorakas area off-limits to new migrant arrivals in 2021. Anastasiades’s government had already slashed the number of immigrants allowed into the country. In 2022, it carried out around 7,000 returns, the most in relation to population of any EU country.

The government intervention emboldened the fascists who went on the rampage again last Friday in Limassol, the second largest urban area in Cyprus after Nicosia. This time the police stood down entirely and allowed the mob to terrorise refugees and anyone who they viewed to be foreign. The *Cyprus Mail* reported, “The anti-immigrant protest held in Limassol... revealed a rampant extremism that had no qualms about destroying everything in sight, and a shocking failure from police to keep the situation under control.”

It added, “Children were in sight as firecrackers were thrown randomly and that no one died during the violence was nothing short of a miracle.” The pogrom was led by around “200 black-clad rioters screaming ‘Cyprus is Greek’ and began with the chant ‘we’ll start with the blacks first and then police.’”

The report continued, “Thugs targeted anyone with the ‘wrong’ skin colour. An Asian woman who saw her business smashed to pieces sat on the pavement unable to speak through her sobs, managing only to choke out ‘I have four children’. The protestors who chanted they wanted migrants out of the country broke the till of her store and stole all her money that she wanted to send to family back home...”

“Targeted attacks towards migrants went unchecked by police, and businesses owned by foreign nationals such as a Syrian barbershop and food place were smashed to pieces... Despite it being a well-known fact that the seafront has a host of multicultural businesses, there were no police officers to man the area and ward off violent protesters.”

The article noted, “A group of Syrian men that saw their shop smashed to pieces stared at the scene in shock and said ‘there were five police cars here and they didn’t do anything. They saw everything... the infamous police water cannon Aiantas stood there idly, and ultimately served as a decorative accessory.’”

It concluded that “ultimately on Friday night, it was the thugs that controlled the area, not the police” even “Though police knew since at least the day before about the planned protest, and after a week of violent incidents in Chlorakas village.”

Reports attest to the fact that locals and tourists came to the defence of migrants, protecting them as best they could.

Labour Minister Yiannis Panayiotou said in an interview on CyBC’s morning programme Monday that, “No one should be taking the law into their own hands.” This was reported as a condemnation of the far-right, but the real implication is that the repression of migrants should be left in the hands of the government at this stage.

Panayiotou also urged that anti-migrant sentiment should not be allowed to jeopardise a vital source of cheap labour required by the capitalist class. “Economic migrants [must be processed differently] from those seeking refuge from danger whom we are under EU and international obligation to protect.” The *Cyprus Mail* reported “the minister explained... their status must be based on preconditions of economic necessity.”

Panayiotou noted that 110,000 third country nationals are currently employed on the island, compared to 340,000 Greek Cypriots, with another 10,000 Greek Cypriots registered unemployed.

The events in Cyprus are a grave warning to workers throughout Europe and internationally. The ruling elite everywhere, no matter the political colouration of the parties and state leaders involved, are enacting the most savage anti-immigration policies, and scapegoating refugees and asylum seekers for society’s ills that are the result of the failure of capitalism.

These noxious policies embolden the fascists to double down on terrorising desperate people, whose only crime is fleeing their poverty-stricken homelands broken by decades of imperialist war and oppression.



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