

Turkey plans to return 1 million Syrians, warns of new migrant wave in Europe

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkey plans to resettle 1 million refugees in northern Syria and may reopen the route for migrants into Europe if it does not receive adequate international support for the plan, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday.

Ankara, which hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, controls parts of northern Syria where it says 350,000 Syrians have already returned. It is setting up a "safe zone" with the United States in the northeast where Erdogan said many more could be moved.

"We are saying we should form such a safe zone that we, as Turkey, can build towns here in lieu of the tent cities here. Let's carry them to the safe zones there," Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara.

"Give us logistical support and we can go build housing at 30 km (20 miles) depth in northern Syria. This way, we can provide them with humanitarian living conditions."

"This either happens or otherwise we will have to open the gates," Erdogan said. "Either you will provide support, or excuse us, but we are not going to carry this weight alone. We have not been able to get help from the international community, namely the European Union."

Under a deal agreed between the EU and Turkey in March 2016, Ankara agreed to stem the flow of migrants into Europe in return for billions of euros in aid.

However, the number of migrant arrivals in neighboring Greece spiked last month. A week ago more than a dozen migrant boats carrying 600 people arrived, the first simultaneous arrival of its kind in three years.

"Our goal is for at least one million of our Syrian brothers to return to the safe zone we will form along our 450km border," Erdogan said.

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