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Israel Deporting 150 Migrants to South Sudan
by Robert Berger

JERUSALEM -- Israel is deporting a second planeload of African migrants as it continues a crackdown on what officials have described as "infiltrators."

Israel says the deportation of 150 people back to their home country of South Sudan is aimed at curbing a flood of African migrants.

More than 60,000 Africans have illegally entered Israel from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula since 2005, most from Eritrea and Sudan. They claim to be refugees, but Israel says the vast majority are economic migrants seeking a higher standard of living.

Government spokesman Mark Regev says Israel is the Jewish homeland, and it has no obligation to offer asylum to African migrants.

"Israel is a small country. We are 8 million people and geographically, we're the size of [the U.S. state of] New Jersey. We are too small to be the solution of all of Africa's problems," he said.

The Africans have been blamed for a growing wave of violent crimes, including rapes of young Jewish women, prompting a backlash among Israelis who have demanded their expulsion.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described the migrants as a "national plague," saying they are a threat to security and the Jewish character of the state.

But many Israelis are appalled by the expulsions. Critics say Israel is a nation of refugees established in the wake of the Holocaust, and it has a moral obligation to help people in need.

Asaf Weitzen is the legal adviser at the Hotline for Migrant Workers in Israel. "This is not acceptable to create a racist reaction to an entire, huge group of people," said Weitzen. "They are asylum seekers; most of them are refugees or could have been recognized as refugees."

Many of the South Sudanese have been in Israel for years, and they have expressed deep disappointment over the government's decision to expel them. But this deportee told Israel Television that he is resigned to his fate.

"There is no way out, you know, I think that we have to go. But you know, we are still saying that there is still danger in South Sudan," he said.

Israel says it is treating the Africans in a humane way. The deportees were given 1,000 euros each to help them start a new life in South Sudan.