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Agency France Press

France to expel Afghan migrants in days

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France will expel a group of Afghans in the coming days, three months after it shut down a migrant squatter camp near the English Channel, a presidential official said on Tuesday.

Presidential chief of staff Claude Gueant told RTL radio "there will no doubt be (expulsions of Afghans) in the coming days" by charter flight.

The refugees' aid group Cimade said in a statement at the weekend that police had told migrants in the northern town of Calais they would be flown to Afghanistan by charter on Tuesday.

Cimade said at least 11 Afghans would be sent back and called on the government to reverse the decision.

Anti-racism campaign group SOS Racisme urged the government to "stop the shameful charter flights immediately."

A police source told AFP that the Afghans could be expelled from Tuesday night by a charter plane coming from Britain that would stop over at Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport.

Gueant on Tuesday declined to confirm the exact date and defended the policy of sending migrants back to Afghanistan, where Western forces are battling the Taliban.

"The United Kingdom sends back more than a thousand Afghans to their country every year, with the agreement of the European human rights commission," he said. "I don't see why France should not do so too."

Prime Minister Francois Fillon defended the expulsions, saying France had made commitments to Britain, the desired destination for many migrants passing through France.

He told a meeting of deputies from his UMP party that France had a "balanced" policy on migrants, according to sources at the meeting.

It will be the latest in a series of expulsions of Afghans since the closing in September of the so-called "jungle", a camp in Calais where many migrants and refugees assembled, hoping to cross the Channel to Britain.

In October three Afghans from France and 24 from Britain were repatriated to their war-torn country, drawing protests from the left-wing opposition and humanitarian groups.