



Civil MRCC

Coordination and documentation platform for people in distress in the Central Mediterranean

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Transfer of people on the move from Lampedusa, Photo: Maldusa

ECHOES

From the Central Mediterranean

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MOVING ON

While the situation in Libya did not improve, the conditions for refugees and migrants in Tunisia continuously worsened during the last few months. Against this background, more than 75.000 people made it to Italian shores until the middle of July 2023. On the 29th of June, a record number of 46 boats reached Lampedusa in a single day, mainly coming from Sfax. The arrival of so many people on the island forced the Italian government to accelerate the transfer process to the mainland. Thousands of people on the move find themselves in a chaotic transit situation in southern Italy. Right when they were just able to overcome one of the deadliest border areas in the world, they are confronted with the attempts of the government to maintain control and filter out people for detention and deportation. **Solidarity at sea and on land is needed** to resist the racist selection and deterrence policies!

Since the beginning of the year 2023:

- 76.325 people arrived in Italy by boat, a significant number of whom **arrived autonomously** (UNHCR figure until the 15th of July).
- 6.134 people were **rescued by the civil fleet** from 99 boats in distress (CMRCC figure).
- 8.718 people were **pushed back** to Libya after they were intercepted by the EU-supported so-called Libyan Coast Guard (IOM figures until 8th July) and 32.792 people were intercepted by the Tunisian authorities. (FTDES figures until 30th June)
- 1.728 people who fled Libya **died** or are reported **missing** (IOM figures until 8th July) and 608 people who fled Tunisia died or are reported missing (FTDES figures until 30th June).



“ Solidarity at sea and on land is needed to resist the racist selection and deterrence policies ”

LATEST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

EVERYTHING IS IN MOTION

TUNISIAN LESSONS ON LAMPEDUSA AND AMBIVALENCES OF AN OPEN SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Mediterranea Saving Humans

“The goal is for the Mediterranean to be a calmer sea, said the Italian Foreign Affairs Minister Antonio Tajani on the eve of signing the memorandum of understanding between the European Union and the Tunisian regime of Kaïs Saïed. But the Mediterranean, the central part in particular, is by no means “quiet.”

According to data by the Italian Ministry of the Interior as of 14th July 2023, 74.718 people have landed in Italy since the beginning of the year. Of which 3.120 departed from Turkey, 28.825 departed from Libya, and as many as 42.773 from Tunisia. It is on this last route that all the attention of recent months has been focused. Starting with the situation on the Tunisian mainland, identified since last year by people moving from Africa as a possible and viable alternative to Libya, less violent and cheaper. But this place of passage has also become, with the authoritarian turn of the presidential regime in the face of a deep economic and social crisis, the scene of a racist campaign from above and pogroms in the streets. A place to leave as soon as possible by taking to the sea.

Thus, mostly on dangerous iron boats departing from Sfax, the flow to the island of Lampedusa – the “Gateway to Europe” - has become continuous and unstoppable, a precarious route to freedom for thousands of people. Here, the Italian government was forced by migrant pressure to change the management and reception of arrivals: the declaration of a 'state of emergency for immigration' and the 'full powers' assigned to a prefect-commissioner of Civil Protection meant a sharp change of pace in the management of the hotspot center on the island and of transfers.

With the entry of the Red Cross, the length of stay in the hotspot was drastically reduced, 24/72 hours at most, with an enhanced ferry system of civil and military ships and sometimes planes to transfer people to Sicily and other Italian regions, as documented by Maldusa project. At peak times, migrants are forced to stay longer, in undignified conditions, and their rights to proper information and access to procedures for applying for protection are

often not guaranteed. In the same way, the reception system throughout Italy is revealing all its inadequacy: new tensions are erupting, with riots in recent days in the detention centers (CPR) in Caltanissetta and Milan, and new conflicts are opening up between the central Government, Regions and local Administrations.

Speed and efficiency of procedures and transfers show a possible *ambivalence*: on the one hand they offer spaces of greater freedom to people on the move, on the other hand, in the government's intentions, they should prepare the ground for more effective detention mechanisms aimed at expulsion from Italy and forced deportation to "so-called safe third countries." Every single person detained in a CPR and/or deported represents unacceptable violence but, for the moment, the government's results on this are still scarce: in the last year just over 2.000 people forcibly removed against more than 105.000 arrivals.

Even at sea, the pressure along the Tunisian route has produced significant changes in the tactics adopted by the Italian authorities. Southwest of the island of Lampedusa, the rescue assets deployed by the Coast Guard and the Guardia di Finanza are clearly insufficient and their ships and operatives overwhelmed by the number of people at sea at risk of shipwreck. This is due to the government's political choice not to take note of the real situation and the consequent refusal to deploy adequately larger and more numerous assets, including those of the Navy.

For some weeks now, this has also led to a change in attitude towards the Civil Fleet: small non-governmental vessels (such as Nadir, Mare*Go, Aurora, Astral, Aita Mari, Rise Above) operating from or around the island are actively involved in rescues and, increasingly, larger vessels (such as Geo Barents, Humanity1, Ocean Viking, Open Arms, Sea-Eye 4), after carrying out an initial rescue in the Libyan SAR area, are diverted to Lampedusa under the direct coordination of IT MRCC Rome for rescue operations on people arriving from Tunisia.

But, even in this aspect, we must consider the *ambivalence* of the situation: this is by no means a return to the 'golden age' of cooperation between authorities and NGOs, but an instrumental use of the Civil Fleet at a difficult time. In fact, mainly due to the political will of the Viminale, the policy of assigning 'distant ports' for disembarkation continues. And the policy of unjustified and vindictive detention of ships on the basis of the Piantadosi Decree continues: it is

important to note how, out of five cases of ships temporarily detained for 20 days and sanctioned, on no less than three occasions (Louise Michel, Mare*Go and Aurora), authorities have made the decision to disembark people in Lampedusa, refusing ports more than 36 hours away.

Indeed, we must never forget how, in the structural *ambivalence* of the phase we are experiencing, the outsourcing of border management remains the main and only shared political strategy of the Italian government, the EU member states and the European institutions. A strategy that these institutional actors are continually forced to remodel and re-articulate in the face of migrants' irreducible will to practice their right to freedom of movement. And we must never forget how many crimes, how many deaths and how much suffering this political strategy continues to produce. The massacre off Pylos and the responsibilities of the Greek state remind us of this (*see the reconstruction below*). But also, the daily trickle of "little forgotten shipwrecks" along the route from Tunisia and the continuous interceptions, captures and rejections from Libya. Here we must note and strongly denounce how the collaboration of Italy and Malta with General Haftar's militias is beginning to produce its deadly effects with new captures and deportations from the sea towards Benghazi and the other ports of eastern Libya, in a horrendous market of political and economic bargaining on the skin of people on the move.

But even here, we cannot fail to see *ambivalence* looming: thanks to the extraordinary struggles of the Refugees in Libya, which began in October 2021 and have not stopped since, with the successive support campaigns that have come with Un-Fair all the way to

Geneva, Libya has long ceased to be just a 'black hole' of violence and torture. Even for that context, collective action can produce positive results. How can we fail to recognise the coincidence between the latest mobilisation in front of and inside the EU institutions in Brussels and the liberation of many protagonists of the struggles from the infamous Ain Zara camp in Tripoli?

Resistance and the practice of freedom of movement by migrants, continuity and development of the political and operational capacity of the Civil Fleet, constant pressure from a public opinion enriched by multiple social and religious, cultural and political orientations are not only keeping open, but are deepening the contradictions of the border regime, fighting its brutality. Here, too, there is still *ambivalence*: on 13th July the European Parliament's resolution speaks, for the first time in years, of a new institutional SAR mission and of collaboration with NGOs, while the 'Team Europe' (composed of Von der Leyen, Rutte and Meloni) signs on 16th July with President Saïed a memorandum of understanding trying to replicate in Tunisia the Libyan business model 'to stop departures': hundreds of millions of euros to build a cruel mechanism of capture, rejection and detention. But despite the very high price paid in terms of human lives, this inhuman and criminal model has proven not to work.

The Mediterranean is far from "calm."

Everything and everyone is in motion. And they have no intention of stopping.

16th July 2023

Italian coast guard ship arriving to the port of Lampedusa, July 2023, Photo: Maldusa



Lampedusa

29th of June 2023

On this day 46 boats from Tunisia and Libya arrived on the island. Only during the last days of June more than 4000 people risked the dangerous routes and reached Italy to ask for protection and looking for future perspectives in Europe.

Brussels

1st of July 2023

Spokesperson for Refugees in Libya, for Refugees in Tunisia and from Alarm Phone Sahara in Niger came together in front of EU-institutions to accuse the death and suffering in these countries as a consequence of the EU-policy of border externalization.

Caltanissetta

2nd of July 2023

About 50 people imprisoned in the repatriation centre rioted against the injustice of detention and the threat of deportation by setting fire to mattresses inside the halls and climbing on the roof of the building.

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE SITUATION IN TUNISIA AND THE NEW EU-TUNISIA DEAL

*by the migration-control.info project and Alarm
Phone Tunis*

The economic crisis in Tunisia is worsening and racist attacks against Tunisia's Black population are again escalating. Especially in Sfax, Black people are suffering from racially motivated violence. Systematic collective expulsions to the desert of the Libyan-Tunisian and Algerian-Tunisian border zones are carried out by Tunisian security forces – while the EU is visiting Tunisia with more millions to stop migration at any costs.

Racially motivated violence and mass deportations to the desert

After Anti-Black racist pogroms against Tunisia's Black population already happened in the beginning of the year, triggered also by the publication of a racist statement by the Tunisian President Kais Saied on February 21, the violence against Black migrants in Tunisia is again escalating. In Tunisia's second largest city, Sfax, violent riots have been going on for days, with mobs repeatedly attacking Black people. Already in June, two anti-migrant demonstrations took place, using racist tropes to incite anti-Black migrant sentiment.

According to reports, large groups of Black people have been expelled from Sfax into the desert by Tunisian security forces since July 2. Up to [1,200 people were brought in buses to the Libyan-Tunisian border by Tunisia's National Guard](#) and were left behind in the military zone at the border. Others were brought to the Algerian-Tunisian border zone. The deported report that Tunisian security forces beat them, took their food and broke their mobile phones. [People who tried to escape Sfax by train, fleeing north towards Tunis, were taken out of the train and were deported in buses to the desert.](#) They are abandoned to die – and they do. Among those expelled are also people in a legalised situation, including asylum seekers and refugees, which apparently does not protect Black people in Tunisia from being collectively expelled and sent to death.

In the face of these mass deportations, UN organisations such as IOM and UNHCR remained silent. In some localities, humanitarian assistance from the Tunisian Red Crescent has been made conditional on people accepting so-called "voluntary return". Although Tunisian civil society is trying to

mobilise to provide emergency assistance, a large proportion of those deported remain inaccessible, being in border areas off-limits to the public.

No one knows what the fate of these people will be. While some are taken to emergency accommodation in border towns, others are deported again as soon as they try to reach Tunisian territory, finding themselves in the crossfire between the Tunisian authorities on the one hand, and the Algerian or Libyan authorities on the other. While these people have been wandering in the desert for several weeks now, many have disappeared. The Alarm Phone hotline has collected reports of [dead bodies](#), and others [slowly dying](#) from lack of food and water.

In the Tunisian capital Tunis, the situation is not better either. For nearly five months, the protest of the [Refugees in Tunisia](#), we reported about in the [ECHOES, n. 6 from May 2023](#), has been ongoing. Around 150 people are still camping in front of the headquarters of the IOM, demanding to be evacuated to a place of safety after having lost everything. Their lives are still in danger, the conditions in the camp continue to be terrible. An interview with one of the protesters from May 2023 can be found [on the migration-control.info blog](#).

The situation for Black migrants on land gets worse and worse. But also when crossing the Mediterranean to leave Tunisia, they face violence by the Tunisian Coast Guard. Reports about the theft of engines by the Tunisian Coast Guard accumulate, leaving people adrift in unseaworthy boats, [which has already led to the drowning of boats](#). Recently, the Coast Guard has been accused of firing tear gas into a boat which caused panic on board and led to the sinking of the boat, [as InfoMigrants reports](#).

But not only non-Tunisians face these brutal practices. Also Tunisians suffer from the violence exerted by security forces. Further, the structural violence of the socio-economic situation but also the crackdown on the Tunisian civil society and against everyone considered an opponent of the president is leading to a constantly increasing number of Tunisians leaving the country. Tunisia is more and more becoming a country that is left by its own citizens. As it is not very likely that the economic situation will improve in the short term, the number of people leaving will continue to rise. Tunisia has already replaced Libya as the main departure point for the route to Europe: [according to the UNHCR 37,720 people who departed from Tunisia have arrived in Italy](#) between January 01 and July 9.

The EU is paying Tunisia's pogroms

And while human rights are being disregarded on land and sea, the assembled EU delegation is visiting the authoritarian Kais Saied. At the photo session on June 11, Italian post-fascist Meloni, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte, and Commission President von der Leyen appear in a good mood with President Saied, announcing what they call their "comprehensive partnership package". Despite the current developments, the EU will support Tunisia with a total of more than [€1 billion](#) of aid in return for better border control and measures against human "smuggling". The EU Commission is considering up to €900 million in macro-financial assistance and €150 million in immediate budget support. Further €100 million are dedicated for border management, search and rescue, anti-"smuggling" measures and other initiatives, which also means [more boats, mobile radar, cameras, vehicles, spare parts and engines](#) for Tunisia's security forces.

Just eight days after "Team Europe", as they call themselves, left Tunisia, the German and French Ministers of Interior, Faeser and Darmanin, arrived in Tunisia with more money and border deals in their luggage: more €25 French millions were about to come. Parallely, the [EU Commission announced €150 million](#) more from the foreign policy fund NDICI for „border management and anti-smuggling“.

The new deal, that was finally signed on Sunday, July 16, that is in fact the continuation of a long history of externalisation policies in Tunisia, is in the eyes of von der Leyen and her Team Europe aiming "[to act as a blueprint for similar partnerships in the future](#)". Cash, equipment and political legitimization for being the border guard of Europe, despite human rights violations of those on the move but also of local



Photo: Haïfa Mzalouat, Protest in Tunis, April 2023

populations – we have observed these policies for decades.

These deals are even more worrying than they were before, given the current reform of the Common European Asylum System which includes that the likelihood to be granted asylum also depends on if people seeking asylum entered the EU via so-called safe third countries. "[The EU can determine these at its convenience. The classification of Turkey, Tunisia, and some Balkan states, for example, would cover practically all arrivals](#)" – and it is likely to happen that Tunisia is classified as a safe third country. The consequence: more deportations to a [country that is neither safe for non-Tunisians nor for Tunisians](#).

International Resistance and Solidarity

The images of the attacks of Black people in Sfax, those of abandoned people dying of thirst in the desert, being unable to move forward or backward in the military zone between Libya and Tunisia, are unbearable.

The EU-Tunisia deal that is put in place rewards the Tunisian security apparatus with more money and equipment, bolsters Anti-Black racism while also repressing Tunisia's civil society and is legitimising the ongoing violence. It is in line with the EU's migration policies that have violated freedom of movement for years, having led to violence and death along the EU's external borders. But how to successfully fight these ongoing practices if "denouncing the torture practices of al-Sisi's regime in Cairo, the violence against detained refugees by Libyan militias, or the crimes of the RSF fails to attract attention as it is"? It is true, we "need new counter-strategies — against deals with autocrats, the CEAS, and the exclusionary understanding of refugee rights and protection currently being revived," [as pointed out by Sofian Philip Naceur](#).

What is for sure is that the European deals won't stop migration movements and that people will continue to cross the Mediterranean. Blocking the route for Tunisians, would jeopardise the country's social stability, a scenario that the political elite wants to prevent.

**Despite the dangers that European externalisation policies exacerbate, arrival numbers in Lampedusa are likely to stay high and people will continue to move in search of a better life. For the freedom of movement!
Tear down Europe's borders!**

IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

A DIARY OF RESCUE COORDINATION BY CIVIL ACTORS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The following section provides an overview of the level and impact of rescue coordination by civil actors in the Central Mediterranean Sea, using brief reports and Twitter extracts.

In the first two months of the year the weather conditions were fairly bad, while people on the move still use the short good weather windows in between. The civil fleet rescued 995 people from 16 boats in distress. Most of these departed from Libya, while it

remains difficult for civil actors to operate closer to the Tunisian shores where since the racist developments in Tunisia it again became clear how unseen and how unreported the violence of the Tunisian Coast Guard and Navy is.

MAY 2023

1 May

After **Alarm Phone** received and forwarded several distress calls to authorities and NGO's, the **Geo Barents (Médecins Sans Frontières)** is able to rescue 299 people from a huge overcrowded fishing vessel and 36 people from a small fiberglass boat.

The civil aircraft **Seabird 1 (Sea-Watch)** supported the search and rescue from above (1).

5 May

The **Aita Mari (Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario)** found and assisted 6 little iron boats which fled Tunisia towards Lampedusa.

16 May

The **Geo Barents** rescues 26 people in a rubber boat after **Alarm Phone** relayed the distress call (2).

17 May

With the help of **Colibri 2 (Pilotes Volontaires)** the **Louise Michel** is able to rescue the 71 people who reached out to **Alarm Phone** before (3).

26 May

The **Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity)** rescues 88 people who called the **Alarm Phone** for help before (4).

28 May

On her way towards the Libyan coast the **Geo Barents** was requested to help rescue a 599 people boat on its way to Italy. The Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination center wasn't able to perform the rescue alone (5).

The **Sea-Eye 4 (Sea-Eye)** rescues 17 people which have been spotted by **Colibri 2 (6)**.

29 May

The sailing ship **Nadir (RESQSHIP)** rescues 22 people from a self made iron boat. A nearby fisher relayed the distress (7).

30 May

The crew of the **Sea-Eye 4** spots and embarks safely 32 people from a wooden boat.



MSF Sea
@MSF_Sea

1

BREAKING NEWS

No rest for our team – just after completing trainings and entering #Malta's search and rescue region, #GeoBarents today rescued around 300 people, including many women and children, from an overcrowded wooden boat in distress.



MSF Sea
@MSF_Sea

2

BREAKING NEWS

Following an alert from the @alarm_phone, #GeoBarents just rescued 26 people in distress on an unseaworthy boat located in international waters off #Libya.



LouiseMichel
@MVLouiseMichel

3

1/2 **71** people rescued from boat in distress. Less than a day after being back at sea, our crew was informed by aircraft Colibri 2 from @PVolontaires about a potential distress case.



SOS Humanity (International)
@soshumanity.en

4

Breaking: After rescuing 88 people from distress at sea this morning, the #Humanity1 was assigned the port of Livorno, Italy 1400 km away - 4 days of travel! The survivors report a second boat in distress, but Italian authorities order us to go back to Italy.



Sea-Eye
@seaeyeorg

5

Die Entfernung zum sicheren Hafen, der der #SEA-EYE4 von Italien zugewiesen wurde, ist mehr als dreimal so lang wie die Entfernung zum nächstgelegenen Hafen, Pozzallo. Für die über 1300 Kilometer lange Strecke benötigt die SEA-EYE 4 voraussichtlich viereinhalb Tage.



MSF Sea
@MSF_Sea

6

BREAKING NEWS

While our team was conducting training activities off the Sicilian coast, the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre contacted #GeoBarents to assist an overcrowded boat in distress with 599 people onboard.



RESQSHIP
@resqship

7

(1/2) Gestern Nachmittag fand unsere Crew zw. Tunesien & Lampedusa ein seeuntüchtiges Stahlboot mit 22 Menschen an Bord. Die Crew erfuhr durch den Funkruf eines Fischers von dem Seenotfall. Aufgrund von zunehmendem Wind & Wellen nahm die Nadir die Menschen zu sich an Bord.



Picture: MSF Sea @MSF_Sea

JUNE 2023

1 June

The **Mare*Go** performs her first rescue of 36 people who tried to reach Lampedusa. Italian authorities ordered to disembark the survivors in Trapani which is a day of sailing away. For not complying but instead disembarking the survivors at the nearest port of safety which was Lampedusa, the ship got detained for 20 days.

2 June

The **Nadir** rescues 2 people and assists several other boats around Lampedusa. **Colibri 2** supports the operation from the sky.

Further South the **Life Support** (Emergency) rescues 29 people which have been found by **Seabird 2** while the **Humanity 1** rescues 29 people who have called the Alarm Phone before.

12 June

With the arial support of **Seabird 2** the **Geo Barents** is able to rescue 38 people who had called the **Alarm Phone** for help before (1).

The **Aurora** takes 39 people on board which have been stabilized by the **Rise Above** (Mission Lifeline) before. The **Aurora** gets detained 20 days for arbitrary reasons (2).

17 June

The **Open Arms** responds to a distress case alerted via the **Alarm Phone** and rescues 117 people from a wooden boat.

19 June

The **Nadir** rescues 36 people from an iron boat. A FRONTEX plane issued a mayday relay before.

21 June

The **Aita Mari** (Salvamento Maritimo Humanitario) rescues 172 people from 4 iron boats which departed from Tunisia (3).

24 June

Alarm Phone forwarded the distress call of 14 people in distress. **Seabird 1** spots the boat the next day and also observes a monitoring patrol boat from the Armed Forces of Malta. Later also the Merchant Vessel arrives on scene, but doesn't assist the people.

Finally another day later, 2 days after the first alert the **Geo Barents** rescues the group. The 2 days of non-assistance by the Maltese authorities lead to the death of one person which went over board and to 13 survivors having another traumatic experience which could have been prevented (4).

27 June

Supported by **Seabird 2**, the **Ocean Viking** (SOS Mediteranee) rescues 82 people from a rubber boat fleeing Libya. The group reached out to **Alarm Phone** before.

28 June

The **Mare*Go** assists 2 iron boats on their way to Lampedusa. **Colibri 2** helps to coordinate from the air.

29 June

Mare*Go rescues 41 people from a wooden boat which called the **Alarm Phone** before (5).

30 June

With the help of **Colibri 2**, **Humanity 1** is rescuing 5 boats with a total of 199 people on board. The from Italy assigned port to disembark the survivors is Ortona, a 1300km journey (6).



MSF Sea
@MSF_Sea

BREAKING NEWS

After an alert from [@alarm_phone](#), [#GeoBarents](#) rescued 38 people including an unaccompanied minor.

They were found in distress on an unseaworthy small fiberglass boat located in the international waters in the [#centralmed](#).

[@seawatch_intl](#) provided aerial support

1



Sea-Watch International
@seawatch_intl

The detention of the Aurora is the direct consequence of a political regime that blocks and criminalizes civil sea rescue. As a victim of these policies of Italy, the people in distress on the Mediterranean face death.
[#FreeAurora](#)

2



maydayterraneo
@maydayterraneo

[#Aitamari](#) rescata a 172 personas en una operación conjunta con [#Nadir](#). 7 botes, 294 personas al suroeste de [#Lampedusa](#).
Nadie se jugaría la vida en el mar si se facilitasen [#viaslegalesyseguras](#) y no tuviesen que sufrir desplazamientos.

¡Ellas sí vivirán!

[@davidmelo](#)

3



Alarm Phone
@alarm_phone

We are relieved that [#MareGo](#) found the people in distress who alerted us and asked for help as the boat was adrift.
Welcome to Europe!

4



MSF Sea
@MSF_Sea

BREAKING NEWS

This morning, the team on [#GeoBarents](#) rescued 13 people, including 2 women and 2 unaccompanied minors, who were in distress on a unseaworthy rubber boat.

The survivors had spent more than 3 days at the [#Mediterranean](#) sea.

5



SOS Humanity (international)
@soshumanity_en

[1/2] **Breaking:** After rescuing 199 people in five rescue missions the crew of [#Humanity1](#) has resumed the transit to the assigned port of safety: Ortona, Italy, about 1,300 km away. In vain, the captain asked for a closer port for the severely weakened survivors.

6



ANALYSIS

THE “SAR3” REGION: A FAST-DEVELOPING REGION FOR SEARCH AND RESCUE

By Alarm Phone

In the previous edition of ECHOES, we highlighted the growing concerns regarding a potential collaboration between Italy and Eastern Libya, which could lead to an anticipated increase in pullback operations within the “SAR3” region. Shortly after the visit of the Eastern Libyan delegation to Rome, our concerns were validated. On May 24, Alarm Phone received a distress call from 27 individuals aboard a small boat that had departed from Benghazi (SAR event AP0701). While the boat was still navigating in the Libyan SRR, a merchant vessel named LONG BEACH coordinated by IMRCC came to their rescue. This incident differs from the GRIMSTAD case on April 29, described in the previous edition of ECHOES, where the MRCC in Rome publicly disclaimed any responsibility for the refoulement: in the press release issued on May 25, the Italian MRCC stated that they had assumed the coordinating role in the refoulement of the rescued individuals, who were subsequently pushed back by the crew of the LONG BEACH.

Even if the boats crossing the “SAR3” region finally manage to reach the Maltese SRR, they still face significant challenges due to the systematic non-assistance policy enforced by the MRCC in Valletta. The officers in Malta persist in instructing merchant vessels to refrain from rescuing distressed boats, particularly if they are not adrift. This was once again evident in the case of 36 individuals who contacted Alarm Phone on May 2 (SAR event AP0630). Despite the cargo ship MARCO POLO being close to them, it finally proceeded without intervening. In a VHF communication with the civil aircraft Seabird, the bridge of the merchant vessel confirmed that Malta instructed them not to rescue the boat since it was not deemed to be in distress. Fortunately, the crew of Geo Barents, under the coordination of the ITMRCC, was able to reach the 36 individuals and safely bring them aboard the rescue ship, providing the assistance they needed.

Furthermore, in addition to the lack of assistance, a highly perilous pushback operation took place. On the afternoon of May 23, 2023, Alarm Phone received a distress call from a boat with about 500 people onboard, who departed from Tobruk, Libya. Their

boat had suffered an engine failure, leaving them adrift 30 nautical miles into the Maltese SAR region. Despite the presence of several merchant vessels in close proximity, none of them intervened to offer assistance. The situation escalated during the night when a merchant vessel narrowly avoided colliding with the distressed boat, indicating a failure by RCC Malta to inform nearby ships of the drifting boat. Despite subsequent search efforts by Seabird2 and Life Support, the missing boat remained elusive. Shockingly, it was later discovered that the boat, along with its approximately 500 occupants, had been forcibly towed back over 330 km to the port of Benghazi in Libya—an illegal and highly dangerous operation.

The role of the JRCC in Valletta in these refoulement operations remains not completely defined. However, shortly after this incident, on May 29 and 30, a Maltese diplomatic delegation, comprising the AFM Commander and Malta's Special Envoy for Migration, engaged in discussions with key authorities in Benghazi. The primary focus of these talks revolved around the security challenges that both Malta and Libya face in the region, particularly regarding “irregular migration”. During the meetings, the delegations reached an agreement to enhance military cooperation between their respective navies and armed forces. This cooperation aims to prevent unauthorized crossings and reinforce the border blockade from Eastern Libya to the Maltese area. However, it also evoked the potential establishment of a direct air connection between Benghazi and Malta to consolidate commercial exchanges in the region.

On June 12, the civil aircraft Seabird1 witnessed the completed interception of 48 people by the Tareq Bin Zeyad, a fast middle-sized boat associated with the Libyan navy based in Benghazi. The involvement of this asset was reported during another case of refoulement, but the precise documentation of its role could not be obtained at that time. The same asset, Tareq Bin Zeyad, was once again involved in a pushback operation of a fishing vessel carrying 250 people who had already reached the Malta SRR. Seabird2 could document the interception on July 9: the merchant vessel GAZ VENTURE was heading towards the distressed fishing vessel, awaiting instructions as confirmed by the bridge of the cargo ship through VHF communication with Seabird2 crew. However, the JRCC in Valletta instructed the

merchant vessel to leave the scene, stating that operations would be handled under their coordination. Nevertheless, it was once again the Tareq Bin Zeyad that approached the distressed fishing vessel and forcibly returned the 250 individuals to Libya. Thereby, it disregarded the clear order from the AFM aircraft present at the scene, which had explicitly stated the lack of coordination by competent authorities and commanded them to immediately abort the operation.

These pushback operations conducted from the Malta SRR seem to have a significant impact on migration routes, as reported by some groups in Eastern Libya. It seems that these events prompted other boats to circumnavigate the Malta SRR and seek alternative paths, resulting in an increased flow through the Greek SRR. However, tragically, the Greek maritime authorities perpetuate their much documented hostile and criminal attitude towards the boats crossing the Mediterranean, leading this time to a dramatic shipwreck that claimed the lives of over 600 people. A dedicated section on this event has been included in this edition.

The outcome of the boats crossing the “SAR3” region, though, is still very unpredictable, as the recent cases involving the merchant vessels VALPIAVE, MAERSK VALLETTA, and IBLEA confirm. On June 24, the merchant vessel VALPIAVE, carrying an Italian flag, rescued 47 individuals in Libyan territorial waters, after Alarm Phone alerted the insurance company the day before, while the ship was sailing close to the distressed boat. The VALPIAVE transferred the

rescued individuals to an Italian coast guard vessel, which disembarked them at the port of Pozzallo. Similarly, on June 26, the container ship, MAERSK VALLETTA, responded to a distress call from a small boat carrying about 25 people in international waters that the civil aircraft Seabird 2 spotted the previous day. The MAERSK VALLETTA confirmed to have been instructed by the Italian MRCC to rescue the distressed individuals. On the same day, Alarm Phone contacted the company and insurance of the chemical tanker IBLEA regarding a boat carrying around 100 people that departed from Tobruk and experiencing heavy distress. The MRCC in Rome coordinated a rescue operation and instructed the tanker to take the people in distress on board and head to Italy for disembarkation. All the people rescued in these operations were later disembarked in Pozzallo, Sicily, after being transhipped by Italian Coast Guard units.

The fate of boats departing from Eastern Libya and crossing the SAR3 region remains highly unpredictable, especially prior to reaching the Italian SRR. The recent SAR events in this region prompt a crucial reflection on the potential role that civil organizations may have played, if any, in influencing the outcomes of these cases. It is essential to assess the impact of civil actions within this context and consolidate a comprehensive strategy to effectively address future events in the region. By analyzing our involvement and understanding the complexities of this region, we can strive to enhance our impact and provide better support for those on the move.

Sea Watch, A ship of the Libyan Tarek Ben Zayed militia during a push-back in June 2023 photographed from aboard the Sea-Bird 2



LEGAL FRAGMENT

ITALY ORDERED TO READMIT REFUGEE ILLEGALLY PUSHED-BACK TO LIBYA

By Sarita Fratini

On June 10th, a Sudanese refugee, victim of the illegal refoulement from Asso Ventinove merchant vessel on the 1st and 2nd of July 2018, won the case brought against part of the Italian government (Council of Ministers, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italian Embassy in Tripoli) at the Ordinary Court of Rome, Personal Rights and Immigration section.

The case stemmed from an unlawful pushback of 276 migrants, including the applicant, materially carried out by the Italian-flagged off-shore support ship Asso Ventinove, but ordered directly by the Italian Navy. The case remained secret until 2019, when it was discovered by the Josi & Loni Project collective, which was able to find 80 of the 276 victims. "The judge," it is written in the executive ruling, "accepts the appeal and, as a result, declares the right of Mr. Appellant to apply for international protection in Italy and orders the competent administrations to issue all acts deemed necessary to allow his immediate entry into the territory of the Italian State." A great victory for 'Harry' (fictitious name), for his legal team composed of lawyers Cristina Laura Cecchini, Loredana Leo, Giulia Crescini and Ginevra Maccarrone within the ASGI's Sciabaca & Oruka project and for the JLProject.

Other appeals, still awaiting judgment, have been filed for the same case, especially the compensation case brought by five Eritrean citizens in 2021 against Corrado Pagani, captain of the Asso Ventinove, the Naples-based shipping company Augusta Offshore, and the Italian government. Among the five was a pregnant woman who was separated from her husband and was forced to give birth and raise her child on the floor of the terrible Triq al Sikka detention camp. Among those who could not sue their deporters were Josi and Seid, who died of starvation and disease in Libyan camps following deportation, and Amela, who was raped and murdered by a Libyan.

Today, Harry could be celebrating his long-awaited legal victory against the terrible injustice of the illegal deportation he suffered five years ago. But instead, he is suffering from a new atrocious injustice: the

Italian embassy in Tripoli, headed by Ambassador Gianluca Alberini, refuses to respect the sentence issued by an Italian judge requiring it to immediately transfer the refugee to Italy. The sentence is enforceable and Harry is entitled to take a plane from Tripoli to Rome.

But unfortunately, he has no passport, a condition common to most refugees (Libyan camps' guards steal money and documents from detainees). He only has the UNHCR document (refugee status), but this is not a travel document. The Italian Embassy in Tripoli lost the case and as a result of the ruling it must immediately issue a replacement document allowing Harry to board the plane. Yet it does not do so.

Harry is currently in the Tripoli area, where he survives hiding in a dilapidated building with 30 other refugees. They are all at risk of arrest as irregular migrants, an offense for which Libyan law 19/2010, which is currently in force, provides for indefinite imprisonment (including life imprisonment) with forced labour. A reality that Harry unfortunately knows well: in 2018, following refoulement, he was deported to the Libyan camp of Tarek al Mattar and there, tortured for a few weeks, probably to sap his morale, before being moved to forced labour. In five years, Harry has been in and out of several Libyan camps, where he has been the victim and witness of unspeakable violence. He is a registered refugee with UNHCR but has never been evacuated. He certainly cannot return to Sudan.

It is in this limbo that Harry was found and helped by the JLProject. The JLProject was founded in 2019 and is part of *Mediterranea Saving Humans* since February 2023. It is a collective currently made up of 50 ordinary citizens who carry out pro bono forensic investigations to help those whose rights have been violated and who cannot afford to hire an investigator. The JLProject has a particular focus on illegal refoulements in Libya: it finds victims and produces evidence dossiers for their lawyers.

Currently, the JLProject is working on 66 cases of deportations from international waters to Libyan detention camps with found victims. These deportations appear in the database of 'Joint Operation Themis', a European border control operation Frontex launched in 2018 in synergy with the Italian authorities and the support of EU Member States. Each of these cases is referred to as 'Operation Themis' and defined as an 'incident', with a six-digit

number. Considering that only European governments and authorities participate in Operation Themis, by its institutional definition, and that collective rejections of foreigners at the border are forbidden in Europe, the 66 cases being investigated by the JLProject can be defined as illegal rejections and prosecuted in European courts.

But the biggest concern now is the Italian government's refusal to respect the rulings of the Italian courts.

REPORT

THE PYLOS SHIPWRECK

INVESTIGATION **BY** **FORENSIC**
ARCHITECTURE

“On 14 June 2023, the *Adriana*, a boat leaving Libya for Italy with hundreds of migrants on board, sank inside the Greek Search and Rescue (SAR) zone in the Mediterranean Sea. This would become the deadliest migrant shipwreck in recent history. Our digital reconstruction of the boat’s trajectory reveals inconsistencies in the Hellenic Coast Guard’s (HCG) account and indicates that over 600 people drowned as a result of actions taken by the HCG.

In the hours following the shipwreck, conflicting accounts about the incident began to circulate. The HCG denied responsibility, claiming that people onboard resisted offers for assistance, and that the boat capsized due to a sudden shift in weight. The survivors unanimously contest this account, blaming the HCG for multiple failed attempts to tow the boat, which ultimately destabilised it and led to its capsizing.

The incident took place at night and in international waters inside the Greek Search and Rescue (SAR) zone, meaning Greece was the coastal state responsible for initiating the necessary search and rescue operations. The wreck now rests 5,000 metres under sea level in the ‘Calypso Deep’, the deepest point in the Mediterranean, rendering its retrieval impossible. The only witnesses to the shipwreck are the 104 survivors of the migrant boat and the crew of a small open sea patrol vessel operated by the HCG, number ΠΠΛΣ 920, the same vessel accused by witnesses of the fatal towing.

According to our analysis and cross-referencing of data, there appear to have been a series of efforts by the HCG to distort and manipulate evidence related to the incident and silence witness accounts. Nearby commercial vessels that were initially summoned by the HCG to provide assistance were subsequently ordered to leave after the ΠΠΛΣ 920 arrived on the

scene. Likewise, repeated offers by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, to deploy aerial surveillance assets were ignored, and none of the several cameras onboard the ΠΠΛΣ 920 nor its AIS tracking system were activated that night as is required.

Furthermore, all the survivors of the wreck had their phones confiscated by members of the HCG. Some survivors we interviewed mentioned that these phones, protected in waterproof cases, included videos they took of the moments leading up to the capsizing of the boat. Yet none of these phones have been returned, despite repeated requests from their owners. The first testimonies from survivors gathered by the HCG the day after the incident display signs of possible manipulation: their accounts use identical, boilerplate language and all fail to mention the towing that migrants later reported to have experienced.

Questions surrounding the sinking and the Greek state’s reluctance to provide clear answers demand a detailed reconstruction of the incident and the events leading up to it. (...)

The migrant boat had three decks - lower, middle and upper - all filled with people. Drawing on accounts from survivors, we estimate the total number of migrants onboard to have been between 720 and 750 persons. Survivors state that ‘in order to go from one place to another, you had to walk on people’. Most of the people were traveling on the bottom deck. There were several women and children in a separate, guarded room in the front of the middle deck. None survived.

The witnesses also described the increasingly dire conditions over the course of the journey. The boat was lost, navigating without equipment, relying mainly on the position of the sun for orientation. The engine was overheating and malfunctioning, and supplies were running low, resulting in at least two people dying from dehydration before the capsizing even took place. The boat was in clear distress. (...)

THE TOWING

According to survivors, when their boat's engine stopped, the HCG vessel approached their boat, with their stern touching its bow. A masked man climbed onto their boat and tied a rope to their railing off-centre, to the right.

They then tried to tow the migrant boat twice. Both attempts lasted, according to the migrants we interviewed, between a few seconds and a few minutes. The first time, the rope snapped. The second time, using the same rope, the HCG pulled away even faster, causing the migrant boat to rock to the right, then to the left, then to the right again, and eventually capsizing to the right (starboard).

A group of witnesses who were sitting inside did not see the towing, but testified that they felt themselves being propelled forward 'like a rocket' long after their engine had stopped working. At 02:06, the HCG log notes that the migrant boat started sinking.

After capsizing, the boat turned upside down, and survivors climbed onto the hull, which was above the water's surface for a few minutes. At this time, the ΠΠΛΣ 920 departed the scene, creating large waves in its wake that made swimming difficult and, according

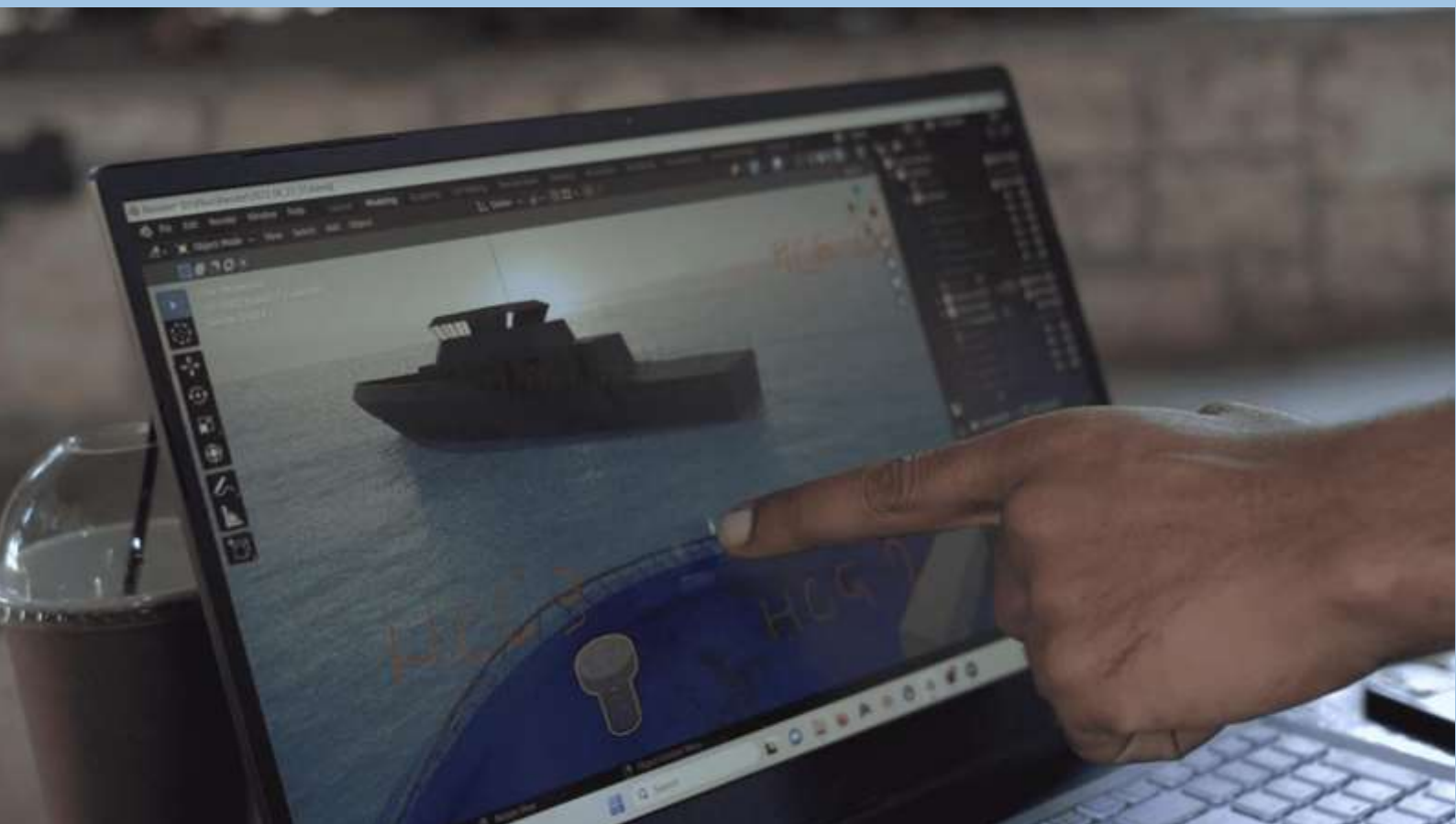
to survivors, further accelerated the sinking of the boat.

Survivors recount that the HCG traveled and remained a considerable distance from their boat, directing its lights towards the people adrift in the water. Numerous individuals from the migrant boat attempted to swim to the HCG boat unsuccessfully. After approximately 20-30 minutes, once the boat had completely sunk, the HCG sent a small Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and started looking for survivors. (...)

In line with the survivors' quest for justice, we will ensure the findings of this investigation be made available to all independent bodies seeking accountability for this deadly incident—an event which demonstrates once again the inhumane and lethal nature of the European border regime.“

Find the full report and a video with a reconstruction of testimonies here:

<https://counter-investigations.org/investigation/the-pylos-shipwreck>



Picture: <https://counter-investigations.org/investigation/the-pylos-shipwreck>

UP TO 600 PEOPLE DROWNED OFF PYLOS, GREECE – ONLY DAYS AFTER EU LEADERS AGREED TO FURTHER ERODE THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM

Excerpts from an open letter signed by over 180 human rights organizations and initiatives together with Tima Kurdi, aunt of Alan Kurdi.

Today on World Refugee Day, we jointly demand full and independent investigations into the events, clear consequences for those responsible, an end to the systematic pushback practices at the European borders, and justice for the victims.

10 years after the two shipwrecks off Lampedusa, Italy, killing around 600 people and causing an immense public outcry, up to 600 people drowned off Pylos, Greece, in the Mediterranean Sea. On June 14, 2023, once again, the European border regime killed people exercising their right to seek protection. We are shaken! And we stand in solidarity with all survivors and with the families and friends of the deceased. We express our deep condolences and grief.

So far, uncountable questions remain unanswered. According to testimonies of the survivors, the Hellenic coast guard towed the boat, causing it to capsize. Why was this incredibly dangerous manoeuvre attempted at all? Did the Hellenic coast guard tow the boat toward Italy to push people forward into Italian or Maltese responsibility? Why did neither the Hellenic coast guard nor the Italian or Maltese authorities intervene earlier, even though they were alerted at least 12 hours before? What role did the European border and coast guard agency Frontex play?

In all this uncertainty, one thing is unmistakable: This shipwreck – as well as countless others before – is the direct consequence of political decisions taken to prevent people from arriving in Europe. This shipwreck results from the impunity of illegal activities exercised by states at borders and the legalization of practices that aim to normalize the deprivation of rights of people on the move. Activists and organizations have denounced systematic push-and pullbacks, delays and omission of rescues, criminalization of civil search and rescue operations, and cooperation with unsafe countries to externalize European borders and to carry out refoulements. European migration and externalization policies cause physical and psychological violence, imprisonment, and death. Stop diverting your responsibility – Stop killing people on the move! [...]

With the unforgivable shipwreck off Greece, we see that the Mediterranean Sea is not only a graveyard, it is a crime scene. A scene of crimes against humanity, with millions of privileged tourists continuing to cruise on it freely every year. **On this account, we demand an immediate end to (systemic) border violence.** [...].

The full text of the open letter can be found here:

<https://sea-watch.org/en/up-to-600-people-drown-off-pylos-greece-only-days-after-eu-leaders-agreed-to-further-erode-the-right-to-asylum-2/>



AMPLIFYING VOICES

REFUGEES IN LIBYA

PROTESTS IN BRUSSELS

By Solidarity with Refugees in Libya

After the collective protests in December 2022 in front of the headquarters of the UNHCR in Geneva, Refugees in Libya and the support alliance mobilized for the end of June 2023 to the European capital. “From Tripoli to Brussels – amplifying the voices of Refugees in Libya” was the title of four days of meetings and camping, of lobbying and demonstrating.

It started on the 28th of June with an exchange meeting with self-organised local actors from Brussels, mainly collectives of Sans Papiers, who are struggling for their right to stay and for housing. A women’s collective was also present, and they finally joined the demonstration a few days later with strong speeches and slogans.

The 2nd day of 29th of June was characterized by a press conference inside the European Parliament and lobbying talks with parliamentarians. David Yambio (spokesperson of Refugees in Libya), Hela Kanakane (from Alarm Phone Tunis and on behalf of Refugees in Tunisia) and Moctar Nalosso (from Alarm Phone Sahara in Niger) were criticizing the European policy of externalization and the subsequent increase in violations of refugee rights in Libya, Tunisia, and Niger. David Yambio demanded again the release of his imprisoned comrades in Ain-Zara and of all refugees in all the detention centres in Libya. The press conference was followed by a meeting with MEPs belonging to the “The Left” fraction, in which the dehumanizing living conditions of people on the move were outlined with videos about the situation in Libya and in Niger.

The 3rd day was dedicated to a “counter summit” in reference to the official EU council summit, which also discussed the migration pact, including the deportations to so-called third safe countries (like Tunisia). The conference opened with a plenary, in



Protest in Brussels, July 2023. Photo: Solidarity with Refugees in Libya

which the history of the movement was shown, and the participants introduced themselves. Shortly after, the activists split into three simultaneous workshops on different topics: “Refugees in Libya: how to improve support for individuals”, “UNFAIR campaign – how to continue?” and “From North Africa to Niger: how to connect the struggles”. In the afternoon, the second workshop session focussed on the topics of “The role of externalisation” and “Legal work in Libya”. The day was concluded with the screening “Libya, No Escape From Hell” and a discussion with the director of the film, Sara Creta.



Picture: Solidarity with Refugees in Libya, Meeting with MEPs in European Parliament, July 2023

The last day, 1st of July, started with the closing assembly in which the content of each workshop was summarized and concluded with a rally, joined by local movements of migrants and Sans Papiers. The demonstration with about 150 participants crossed the capital of the European Union, passing the headquarters of its institutions and the offices of the executors of the brutalization of migration policies: the Council of the EU, the Commission, Parliament, UNHCR, IOM, Frontex, ICMPD.



Picture: Solidarity with Refugees in Libya, Protest in Brussels, July 2023

THE RELEASE OF THE COMRADES, WHO WERE IMPRISONED IN AIN-ZARA SINCE JANUARY 2021

On 30th of June, at the end of the counter-summit, the hoped-for news already arrived at the transnationally composed conference: Officials from UNHCR Libya had surprisingly visited the centre of Ain-Zara with an assessment on the detainees as a starting point for a release process. It was hard to believe, and at first it remained unclear, under which conditions the release should happen. But in the days after it became clear. Agreements have been signed, in which the conditions and methods of release were fixed: transfer to an urban area, financial assistance (in the form of cash and credit cards) for the accommodation and the purchase of non-food items, individual medical interventions based on specific needs.



Picture: Video taken from the first bus of comrades from Refugees in Libya leaving Ain-Zara

On 11 July 2023, after more than 500 days of living in dehumanizing conditions, 74 people found their freedom again. It was the first of two more groups, who were released in the following two days.

The joy of seeing the comrades free was great, and obviously the courage of the representatives of Refugees in Libya and the supporting activities of the solidarity network and the UNFAIR-campaign had an impact. But concerns for the future of the released remain until they are evacuated. Today they are in a similar condition as they were a year and a half ago. Most of them come from Sudan, a country once again plagued by civil war. Libya is still a hell. More than 20,000 people are held in its official and unofficial detention centers.

The closure of all concentration camps and the evacuation to safe countries remains imperative. The fight will go on!

CRIMINALISATION

ITALIAN PENALTIES AGAINST SEA-EYE ARE STATE INJUSTICE!

JOINT STATEMENT BY SEA WATCH AND ALARM PHONE

June 25, 2023

[...] On 30 May 2023, the SEA-EYE 4 was on its way to Ortona, still several hundred kilometers away, with 17 people who had been rescued the day before. The SEA-EYE 4 was ordered by the Coast Guard to sail to this port as quickly as possible, according to the so-called Piandosi Decree, which came into force in February 2023. In this situation, the SEA-EYE 4 received the SOS email from the Alarm Phone hotline at around 10:00. A boat with about 400 people (with the designation AP0741) was in distress in the Maltese search and rescue zone [...].

The only right decision

Against the backdrop (of an illegal push back of a boat one week before with 500 people in the same area) the captain of the SEA-EYE 4 decided to follow the distress case AP0741 and interrupt the route to the north for the purpose of providing assistance as quickly as possible. At any moment, the engine of the overloaded cutter could have failed as well and the 400 people might have faced the same fate as the 500 people the week before, or even worse they could have sunk like the very similarly built boat near Pylos.

Around noon on 30 May, the Seabird 2 reconnaissance aircraft of Sea-Watch was able to locate the boat with the 400 people. The Seabird confirmed the distress at sea in its SOS emails to the authorities. At that time, the SEA-EYE 4 was still about 300 km away from the distress case's last position. Also, because contact with the boat was lost for several hours in the evening and at night, the SEA-EYE 4 missed the boat, which did not report to the Alarm

Phone again until the next morning near the Italian search and rescue zone.

The SEA-EYE 4 had initially found another boat in distress and rescued a further 32 people on its way to AP0741. With a total of 49 people rescued, the SEA-EYE 4 finally headed north to Ortona.

The punitive measures...

Back in port, Sea-Eye was informed, with a reference to the new Italian law of 24.02.2023, that the SEA-EYE 4 would be detained for 20 days in Ortona and that the organisation would have to pay a fine of 3333,- euros because, after having rescued 17 people in the Libyan search and rescue zone, the ship had rescued another 32 people in the Maltese search and rescue zone and had not proceeded as quickly as possible to the port of Ortona.

... a scandal of state injustice

We consider this punishment and the decree issued by the Italian government for this purpose a scandal. It serves solely to deter and criminalise rescue ships – rescue ships that try to intervene as effectively as possible where EU state coastguards have deliberately produced an often-deadly void for years.

Sea-Eye had made the only correct decision on 30 May: to rush to the aid of a sea emergency to which the two organisations signing here had alerted as quickly as possible, especially as a renewed illegal push-back attempt was to be expected. To punish this noble behaviour can only be described as cynical and inhumane.

The full text can be found here:

https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/06/25/italian-penalties-against-sea-eye-are-state-injustice/?post_type=release_type=post

The boat in distress from 30.5.23, which was searched for by the SEA-EYE 4.

Photo: Sea-Watch



MOBILISATIONS

REPORT FROM THE ALARM PHONE PERFORMANCE IN FRONT OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS "WE KINDLY REQUEST YOU TO STOP KILLING"

"Our Brussels action came to an end: 1338 emails were read in front of the EU Parliament in Brussels, but our work is far from over.

We started out on Wednesday noon with the 1st alert from Jan 1st, & finished Friday night at 2am with the last email of June 29, sent only a few hours earlier. We were reading under the midday sun, through wind, rain, and at night, illuminated only by 2 lights.

Surrounded by daytime politicians & nighttime party goers, sometimes we had an audience, sometimes we had none and spoke into the apathetic void. Sometimes we were met with cheers of support & other times with racist ignorance. Regardless, we held our place & kept on reading, one after the other, passing on the microphone to the next person – just like we hand over the phone on our shifts.

Our voices were strong & steady, calm & angry, loud & quiet, desperate & tired – but always determined. As the stack of papers dwindled, the alerts to authorities kept sprawling around the stage on our little island in Place de Luxembourg. On Thursday night, hundreds of white papers were lying on the ground, staring up towards the empty night sky like silent accusations. Hundreds of boats full of people

pushing up against centuries of colonial violence, exploitation and continuous injustice.

As we were nearing the end of the performance, our voices became louder, faster & more urgent. We were reading emails of boats that were still at sea with fates uncertain. And while we know that an arrival is not the end of the journey, and that there are many more imposed hardships still lying ahead, for the brief period we accompany the people, we put solidarity into action.

We don't know if our action in Brussels made any difference, whether we spoke only to those who already knew. But when every single email represents so much more than what is possible to contain on a single sheet of paper, the bureaucratic language we are forced to use will always betray the lives of people on the move. But as their lives matter, every single email does too.

Whether people choose to listen or to throw the paper away, we know what it means and what it has meant for us: we are not done fighting!"



Alarm Phone, Performance in Brussels, July 2023

TUNISIA IS NOT SAFE!

MASS DEPORTATIONS INTO THE DESERT CONTINUE WHILE NEW EU MIGRATION DEAL IS AGREED

July 17, 2023



People arrested in Zarzis and deported to the desert. Photo sent by people who got deported

Today, at 8:56 CEST, Alarm Phone received the following [message](#) from someone who had been deported into the desert by Tunisian forces: “We are not well. We were attacked by armed soldiers. The Libyan forces shot at us, beat us up, and raped the women during the night. I am running out of battery.”

This person is among hundreds who have experienced mass deportations to the border region between Tunisia and Libya, as well as Algeria. For about two weeks now, Alarm Phone has received distress calls from groups in dire situations: in extreme heat, they are surrounded by armed forces on either sides of the borders, blocking all paths of escape. Several deaths have already been reported, as well as many medical emergencies. Still, the different authorities fail to provide any medical assistance.

The Alarm Phone has tried to mobilise support. However, despite all the evidence provided and demands for intervention, the UN organisations IOM and UNHCR fail to act. Furthermore,, humanitarian assistance by the Tunisian Red Crescent has in some regions reportedly been made conditional on people accepting so-called “voluntary returns”. This failure of the International Organisations who are supposed to

protect the rights of refugees and migrants is shameful.

While these mass deportations are ongoing, the EU agreed to a new migration deal with the Tunisian government yesterday, Sunday 16 July 2023. To [cooperate](#) “more effectively on migration”, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte travelled to Tunisia. They agreed on considerable financial assistance to Tunisia’s border management and “anti-smuggling” measures.

This ‘Team Europe’ agreed to this new deal in full knowledge of the atrocities that the Tunisian government has carried out. Especially since 21 February, when president Kais Saied used racist conspiracy theories to target Black people in Tunisia, anti-Black violence has escalated, as Alarm Phone has [documented](#) and denounced, [time](#) and [again](#).

Together with members of Tunisia’s civil society, we are trying to fight these racist pogroms, but our hands are often tied. In Tunisia, civil society actors face criminalisation and harassment by the Tunisian authorities.

If Tunisia carries out mass deportations, if Algerian and Libyan security forces assault and block the deported, if the EU politically sanctions and financially supports such violations, and International Organisations remain silent – what can we do when we receive calls from people who are slowly dying?

We will continue to stay in contact with those forced into the desert region. We will continue to amplify their voices calling for help and denounce the inhumane and racist border violence that they face.

Alarm Phone

The full text can be found here:

<https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/07/17/tunisia-is-not-safe-mass-deportations-into-the-desert-continue-while-new-eu-migration-deal-is-agree>



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