



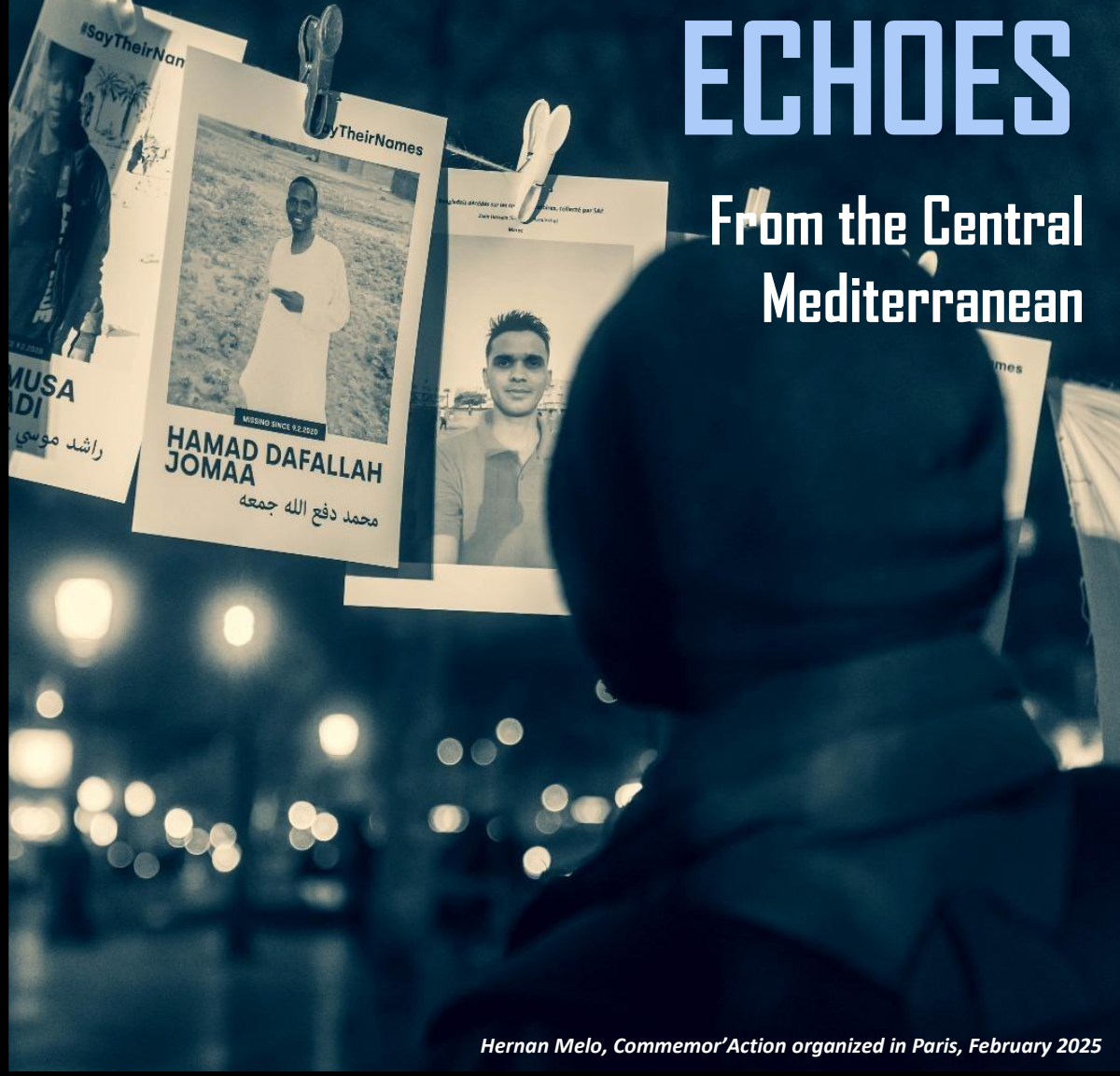
Civil MRCC

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

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# ECHOES

## From the Central Mediterranean

Hernan Melo, Commemor'Action organized in Paris, February 2025

### P.2 – POLITICAL DVPTS

Italy: from Mitiga to Matrix / Tunisia: criminalization of solidarity

### P.8 – ANALYSIS

The Atlantic route / Libya-Crete route

### P.13 – FORCED TO DISAPPEAR

Research and identification onboard

### P. 15 – INTERVIEW

ECCHR: “The fight against impunity”

### P.18 – CRIMINALISATION

El Hiblu3: 6 years of struggle

### P.27 – MOBILISATION

Call to action: Free movement! Open borders. End deaths.

## COMMEMOR'ACTION!

CommemorActions took place on February 6 across dozens of cities in Europe and North and West Africa. Relatives of the disappeared participated in many meetings and demonstrations to commemorate their missing loved ones and to condemn the deadly EU border regime. For more than thirty years, the direct or indirect violence of border regimes has continued to cause death and disappearances along migratory routes. Shipwrecks occur in succession, often marked by the lack of assistance and, at times, the active involvement of Coast Guards and Frontex. The number of people disappearing without a trace, either at sea or in the desert, keeps increasing. For more than thirty years, families and all those fighting for equal mobility rights have continuously demanded truth and justice for these victims. In coming mobilizations to commemorate 10 years of the summer of migration and of the starting of the civil fleet, we should amplify and give visibility to these voices.

Since the beginning of 2025:

- **5,877** people arrived to **Italy** and Malta by sea, many of whom arrived autonomously (UNHCR figures up to February 23)
- **1,025** people were rescued by the **civil fleet** from more than 20 boats in distress (CMRCC figure up to February 26).
- **3,855** people were pushed back to **Libya** after they were intercepted by the EU-supported so-called Libyan Coast Guard (IOM figure up to February 15).
- **101** people have been reported **dead or missing** on the Central Mediterranean Route (IOM figure up to February 15).

# POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

## ECHOES FROM ITALY: FROM MITIGA TO MATRIX

**State crimes and state surveillance in the Mediterranean. Solidarity practices to counter them in the name of truth and justice.**

Two cases at the beginning of the new year caused a stir around the “normalization” of border management in the Central Mediterranean. The facts are well known, but it's worth summarising them and remembering their importance.

On 19th January in Turin, the Italian police stopped four Libyan citizens: one of them was Osama Njeem Elmasry, better known as Almasri, who was taken to prison on the basis of an arrest warrant issued the day before by the International Criminal Court in the Hague. The charges against him are serious: crimes against humanity, human trafficking and enslavement, violence of many kinds, and torture and abuse committed against migrants. Officially Almasri is a “general” at the top of the judicial police, employed by the Government of National Unity in Tripoli.

In reality, he is much more: among the leaders of the Rada militia, he has for years managed the trafficking that occurs around the Mitiga International Airport. At Mitiga he runs one of the most infamous detention camps for migrants, as well as other concentration-like facilities. In recent months the ICC has collected testimonies and overwhelming evidence against him.

And above all, also concerning Italy, Almasri is one of the key men for the management of the “Libya system,” or the terrible mechanisms of interception, capture and detention of people on the move across the country in line with the externalization of European borders, which aims, starting from the Italy-Libya memorandum of 2017, for the rejection and detention in Libya of migrants trying to reach European shores at the cost of unprecedented suffering and thousands of deaths thus far.

The Italian government attempted to hide the news of Almasri's arrest for 48 hours - we will later



Picture: Alliance with Refugees in Libya



understand why - which only became public thanks to the monitoring of activists and independent journalists. The news itself is welcomed by all those who hope that justice will be found for the thousands of women, men, and children trapped in Libya.

But within a few hours, hope turned to disappointment, indignation, and anger: the Italian government organized a mechanism to guarantee immunity and impunity for the criminal Almasri, who was not detained and handed over to the ICC, as international treaties and Italian law itself would prescribe, but was instead released from prison and, formally “expulsed”, accompanied on the evening of 21st January, on a state-sponsored flight carried by an Italian secret service plane, to Mitiga in Libya, where he was celebrated by his militiamen and immediately returned to do his dirty work.

But the Italian government miscalculated, thinking that the matter would end there. Within a few hours, the news of Almasri's release had spread throughout Italy and the world, first raising many questions and then a wave of indignation. While the government remained silent or tried to present clumsy justifications, the role of [Refugees in Libya](#) became crucial: the victims of the Libya system took the floor themselves, explaining to parliament and the media who Almasri really is, what his crimes are, and who his Italian accomplices are.

**The emperor has no more clothes.** And, as never before, the condition of migrants in Libya is laid bare before the Italian public in all its brutality and violence. Moreso, the case clearly shows the direct responsibility of the Italian government. The case cannot be closed and is not closed: the ICC itself publicly refutes the lies of the Italian government and opened a file on the deliberate removal of a wanted person from the jurisdiction of the Court, while the office of the Public Prosecutor in Rome opened an investigation against Prime Minister Meloni, her powerful secretary of state Mantovano and the ministers of Justice and the Interior Nordio and Piantedosi.

In the middle of this case, on the afternoon of January 31, a message sent by Meta (Mark Zuckerberg's company that owns Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) reached the mobile phones of some activists and journalists. This is how it was discovered that since November and December 2024 (though in some cases the intrusion attempts began at least as early as February 2024) sophisticated military-grade spyware had been introduced into the phones of about ninety people in 13 European countries.

The software in question is called Graphite and is produced by the American company Paragon Solutions Inc.: a ‘worm’, as the experts call it, that can be installed without a click, able to read all the files and communications on the mobile phone, but also to transform it into a camera and always-open ambient microphone, and even manipulate the contents, to the point of sending emails and messages in place of the owner. This technology is being sold and can only be used by government agencies. **It seems like the script for the film MATRIX, but it's the reality of the forms of contemporary power. And also how to try to resist.**

For the moment, only the names of six people (five in Italy and one in Sweden) affected by the espionage are known: the president and spokesperson of Refugees in Libya, David Yambio, the Mediterranean activists Luca Casarini, Beppe Caccia and Don Mattia Ferrari, the journalist for the news website Fanpage.it Francesco Cancellato and the Libyan journalist residing in Sweden Husam El-Gomati. But the independent center Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto is conducting in-depth and wide-ranging research that provides new information on this espionage activity every day.

Here too, one fact immediately stands out: **there is a common thread that links the people who have been victims of spyware and the Almasri case: Libya.** All those affected have long been committed to denouncing the situation and showing solidarity with migrants imprisoned in the country. The Italian government, when called upon, first remained silent, then intervened with a press release from Palazzo Chigi (the Italian council of ministers) that was denied a few hours later. On the morning of February 6, Paragon Solutions leaked to the international press that it had two contracts with Italian governmental law enforcement and intelligence agencies, but that it had terminated them for violating the contractual ethical clauses that prohibit spying on journalists, activists, and political opponents.

In this case, too, Meloni's government is trying to impose ‘State secrecy’ on the whole affair, even refusing to answer questions from the political opposition in parliament. But even here it's too late, at least two public prosecutors have opened investigations into what appears to be illegal espionage, in violation of the constitutional rights and freedoms of the victims, and every day new revelations and details are made public about what, for the public opinion, appears to be a big scandal of government espionage against those who practice solidarity.

So while the two cases are more open than ever and new developments can be added every day, some preliminary considerations: it is quite clear that Libya, and more generally the situation in the Central Mediterranean, is the 'black hole' of the last ten years of Italian state policy, with its jumble of interests that intertwine geopolitical and energy issues and the external border management of the European Union. In the name of 'reason of state', any means seems to be justified to defend these interests. But this 'reason of state' includes complicity with militias and criminal gangs, dirty business, brutal violence against innocent and defenseless people, and illegal and unconstitutional actions according to international and national law. Those who denounce and actively oppose all this become a target.

**But for the first time in ten years, all this has been exposed and has become a central topic in public**

**opinion and also in institutional discussions. The question of the externalization of borders and violence against people on the move has finally become a question of democracy, for everyone. Many levels are involved, but we have the extraordinary opportunity not only to expose the dirty tricks of the power and the powerful but also to try to change things. Today more than ever, solidarity, and brotherhood and sisterhood are our most powerful weapons. Truth and justice don't just appear to be a utopia in the name of which it is right to fight, but also something that we can try to achieve. To be continued ...**

Rome, 24th February 2025

*Mediterranea Saving Humans*

## IN TUNISIA, CRIMINALIZATION AS A POLICY TO FIGHT AGAINST MIGRATION AND SOLIDARITY WITH PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Rached Tamboura, Saïdia Mosbeh, Sherifa Riahi, Mahmoud Jouou, Yadh Boussalmi, Mustapha Jemali, Abderrazak Krimi, Abdallah Saïd, and Imen Ouardani are just some of the names of those who were victim of the repressive machine applied by the Tunisian authorities under the presidency of Kaïs Saïed for their work and their solidarity with those on the move.

Since July 25, 2021, and the proclamation of a state of emergency by President Kaïs Saïed, who suspended the Parliament, dismissed the heads of government, and took control of the executive and legislative branches, marking a halt to the democratic transition, the rule of law in Tunisia has been in crisis, and a veritable autocratic regime has been established. In this authoritarian context, dozens of judges have been arbitrarily dismissed, the press and media have been subjected to increasing restrictions, and activists, trade unionists, members of the opposition, lawyers, and journalists have been prosecuted and arrested.

In this context, freedom-restricting reforms and the increasing use of the judicial system (both civilian and military) are the most effective tools for repressing opposition and controlling dissenting voices. A variety of instruments, both old and new, have been regularly used against opponents. Among the new instruments used, Decree-Law 2022-54 on combating

offenses relating to information and communication systems has been used over the past two years to muzzle any dissenting voice and censor any criticism of the regime. With harsh sentences handed down for offenses linked to vague notions such as "spreading false news", dozens of people are in prison for a simple post on social networks.

Although there have been no official developments regarding the reform of Decree-Law 88 on the organization of associations, civic space has been restricted, and dozens of organization representatives are now in prison with charges ranging from terrorism to money laundering and "conspiracy against state security". These arrests are part of a context of criminalization of solidarity with people on the move that has intensified since May 2024, when repression affected many representatives of humanitarian organizations involved in supporting migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

This repression took place alongside hate campaigns against people on the move and racist rhetoric, inaugurated by the Tunisian President's speech on February 21, 2023, which describes sub-Saharan migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as a "threat" to Tunisian national identity. The Tunisian regime has adopted a security and racist policy, attacking people on the move, civil society organizations working

closely with migrants, and any voices criticizing the president's conspiratorial propaganda based on the theory of "ethnic substitution" or "great replacement". In this climate of violence against sub-Saharan migrants, hostility towards civil society organizations active in the field of migrants' rights and the fight against racism has intensified.

Anticipated by a smear campaign on social networks lasting several months, since the beginning of May 2024, the Tunisian authorities have targeted several associations and the representative personalities have been arrested or summoned by the police. The arrest of Saadia Mosbah, icon of the anti-racist struggle and president of the Tunisian association M'nemty, which fights against the various forms of racial discrimination in Tunisia, marked the beginning of a wave of repression that has hit the most exposed figures in humanitarian aid to people on the move.

This arrest was followed by that of Sherifa Riahi, former director of the organization Tunisie Terre d'Asile - active in promoting the right of asylum and defending the rights of refugees - on May 7, 2024, as well as by the arrest of two other members of the association, accused of money laundering. After just a few days, two members of the Tunisian Council for Refugees - an organization active in asylum issues in Tunisia - were taken into custody. On May 10, Iman El Wardani, deputy mayor of the municipality of Sousse who had helped implement integration activities for migrants, and Mohamed Iqbal Khaled, mayor of the municipality of Sousse, were arrested for money laundering, fraud, forming an association for the entry of foreigners and labor abuse.

Abdallah El Said, an activist of Chadian origin and president of the Association des Enfants de la Lune de Médenine - which works for the social and economic integration of migrants - and other employees of the association, were summoned in November by the anti-terrorist brigade. On November 12, 2024, Abdallah El Said was arrested for money laundering and plotting against the external security of the State.

Since December 2024, Saloua Ghrissa, founder of the Association pour la promotion du droit à la différence, has been detained on suspicion of foreign funding.

On January 24, 2025, the detention of Sonia Dahmani, lawyer and columnist, was confirmed for one year and six months for spreading "false" information under Decree 54 on racism and the situation of migrants in Tunisia.

Most of these people are in pre-trial detention awaiting trial. In a context where the principle of presumption of innocence is continually violated, and where people are guilty until proven innocent, preventive detention, which can only be justified as an exceptional measure, has become the rule. In addition to these arrests, dozens of representatives of various associations across Tunisia were repeatedly questioned about their activities within the associations and about finances received from abroad, association equipment raided and premises closed.

This repressive policy, which uses the judicial system to crush all dissent, aims on the one hand to reduce the space for civil society, pursuing the narrative against external interference and state sovereignty, and on the other to increasingly casualize and criminalize the journeys and lives of people on the move.

In a context where a statement, a public intervention, the distribution of food and supplies, a tag - Rached Tamboura was sentenced to two years detention for his graffiti denouncing the racist policies of President Kaïs Saïed -, a dissenting opinion, everything can be used to criminalize and repress, one question remains open: what responsibility do the European Union and its member states have in perpetuating the financing of security policies in Tunisia and in legitimizing its presidency?

***Alarm Phone (Central Mediterranean team)***



**December 18, 2024 : International Migrants Day, sit-in organized in Tunis**



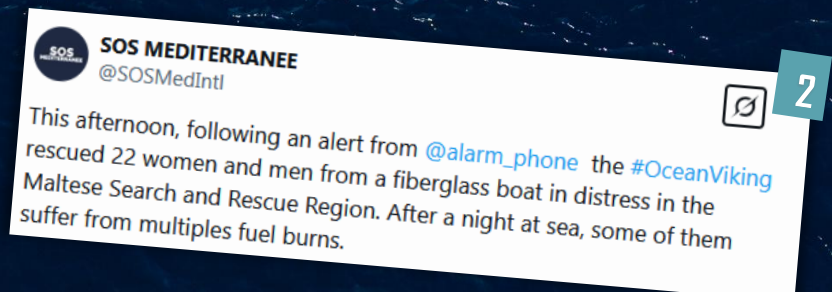
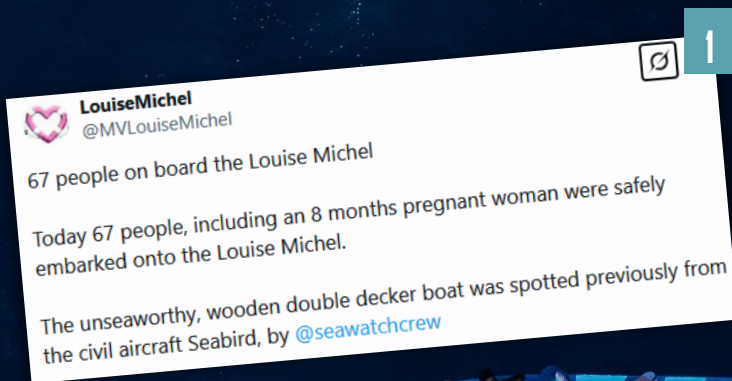
# IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

## 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.

### JANUARY 2025

- January 6** Resq People rescues two groups of people traveling on two different boats, including 4 minors in the group. One of the boats had reached out to **Alarm Phone**.
- January 9** 67 people, including an 8-month pregnant woman are safely embarked onto the **Louise Michel**. The unseaworthy, wooden double decker boat was spotted previously from the civil aircraft **Seabird (1)**.
- January 10** 101 women, men & children are rescued by the **Ocean Viking** from a double-decker wooden boat in distress, spotted by binoculars in the Libyan Search & Rescue Region. Among them are 7 children & 29 women.
- January 21** During the night, 85 people, including 3 babies and 3 pregnant women, are rescued by the **Ocean Viking** from a rubber boat in distress in the Libyan Search and Rescue Region following a Mayday Relay relayed by the aircraft Eagle1. Authorities assign Genova as a Place of Safety, forcing the Ocean Viking to undertake a 4-day journey far from the area of operations.
- January 25** Early in the morning, the crew aboard **Sea Punk I** spots a boat in the Maltese SAR zone. On board, they find 41 people, including 5 women and 6 children. After distributing life jackets, the Sea Punk I crew escorts the boat north to stabilize the situation while continuing to inform the authorities. Only after pressure on the Italian authorities, an Italian Coast Guard vessel finally takes all 41 people safely on board.
- January 26** **Sea Punk** rescues 15 people and recovers 3 bodies. 3 people remain missing. The people have reached out to **Alarm Phone** initially to ask for rescue.
- January 27** Following an alert from **Alarm Phone** the **Ocean Viking** rescues 22 women and men from a fiberglass boat in distress in the Maltese Search and Rescue Region. After a night at sea, some of them suffer from multiples fuel burns (2).



## FEBRUARY 2025

February 18

After reaching out to **Alarm Phone**, 55 people are rescued by **Sailing for Blue Lab** vessel Nihayet Garnagey VI. All people are brought safely to Lampedusa.

After a delay of almost 14 hours by the Italian coast guards, **Open Arms's** vessel Astral is able to reach 52 people on a rubber boat near Lampedusa.

February 19

In the evening, **Astral** finds a deflated and overcrowded rubber boat with 64 people, including a 3 year old child, alerted by the **AlarmPhone**. After assisting the people and completing a medical assessment, all are transhipped to the Italian coast guards.

February 20

During the night, **Humanity 1** crew rescues around 40 people from an unseaworthy rubber boat. The Italian authorities assign the distant port of Civitavecchia, Italy, 870 km away. Shortly before, the crew spotted another boat. It was empty and almost sunk, indicating an illegal pull-back by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard (1).

February 23

During the night 41 people are brought safely aboard the **SEA-EYE 4**. They were traveling in high waves on an overcrowded boat. Italy assigns the port of Naples for the disembarkation (2).

The **Ocean Viking** team performs 2 rescues in the Libyan Search and rescue region: 25 people, including 3 women – 1 of them pregnant – and minors are rescued from a fiberglass boat, and 87 people are rescued from a double-deck wooden boat under coordination of Italian authorities.


February 25

**Humanity I's** crew finds a boat in distress during the night after receiving a distress call from **Alarm Phone**: over 70 people on an unseaworthy rubber boat. The Italian authorities assign the distant port of Ravenna for the disembarkation.



 **SOS Humanity**  
@sos-humanity.bsky.social

1  
● Breaking: Last night, our crew was able to rescue > 40 people from an unseaworthy rubber boat. The Italian authorities assigned the distant port of Civitavecchia, Italy, 870 km away. This is an unnecessary burden for the hypothermic, dehydrated and weakened survivors. 1/3

 **Sea-Watch International**  
@seawatch\_intl

2  
● Last night, we brought 41 people safely aboard the SEA-EYE 4. They were traveling in high waves on an overcrowded boat. Italy assigned us the port of Naples. The crossing there takes three days.

Picture: Sailingfor Blue Lab



# ANALYSIS

## THE FORGOTTEN ROUTE OF THE ATLANTIC

Since 2018, the Atlantic route has witnessed a significant resurgence regarding departures and arrivals in the Canary Islands. This route encompasses a large area of West Africa, with most departures observed between the Gambia and Morocco along this extensive coastline spanning several hundred kilometers. These people on the move aim to reach Spain via the Canary Islands, which serves as the gateway to Europe, much like Lampedusa does for Italy on the Central Mediterranean route. This Spanish archipelago, comprising seven islands, concentrates the majority of arrivals into Spanish territory. In 2024, 46,843 people landed in this area off the coast of the Old Continent.

Like any maritime migration, this route presents many risks and challenges, making it a hazardous and deadly migratory space for those undertaking the journey. The distance to be covered remains one of the primary difficulties for migrants. Indeed, several hundred kilometers are necessary to reach the Spanish archipelago from the African coasts. This maritime zone is particularly hazardous, with intense currents. The area of interest is subject to the Canary Current, which is a very cold coastal current in the Atlantic Ocean, located between the northwest coast of Africa and the North Atlantic Current. It crosses the

Canary Islands, follows the coast, separates, and opens up upon reaching Cape Verde and then the Caribbean to arrive at the Gulf Stream and subsequently Europe; it almost makes a round trip to return to the Canary Islands. The prevailing winds are similar, meaning they also head westward. If a ship breaks down, the current and wind will move it towards America. These currents and the Trade Winds, which regularly blow from east to west, remain more or less stable throughout the year, except for September and October when the weather is calm and there is practically no wind in the islands. This is favorable for makeshift boats.



The pirogues are often overcrowded, typically traditional, and not adapted to the distance to be covered, leading to multiple problems during the crossing.

This vast maritime migratory space possesses several particularities that make it a unique and challenging area to access:

- The multiplication of Search and Rescue Regions (SRRs) and state actors involved in Search and Rescue (SAR) on the route taken by migrants. The zone traverses different SRRs with varying state response capacities that are not necessarily adapted to the growing needs in this area.
- As explained earlier, the risk of getting lost at sea is high, as strong marine currents can carry boats attempting the crossing in directions other than those initially intended.
- The number of deaths and disappearances in this zone continues to increase yearly due to the



surge in departures from the West African coasts. The data from the United Nations remains far from that of international organizations but shows that the Atlantic route is one of the deadliest in the world. In 2024, the IOM recorded 1,086 deaths or disappearances, compared to 9,757 reported by the organization Caminando Fronteras.

This deadly route continues to grow in terms of the number of arrivals on Spanish soil, highlighting its importance in the current maritime migratory system. Nevertheless, the humanitarian and civil response remains timid despite the number of deaths and disappearances recorded each year. It seems necessary and crucial that this route gains visibility and interest from the various international actors working on maritime migration. It seems essential at this stage that additional actors operate in this maritime space despite the different challenges:

- The permanent and perpetual increase in support from the European Union to the

countries of departure to limit population movements and continue the externalization of European borders.

- On the one hand, the humanitarian space is very large, with different countries involved, but the space that the countries of departure and arrival could leave for international actors seems restricted.
- The multiplicity of departure points along the African coast, with departures increasingly from lower points—departures from Guinea-Bissau have also been noted—makes the operational zone complex to apprehend.

Despite the numerous challenges inherent to this route, it seems evident that the possibility of intervening in the zone to limit the number of deaths at sea and advocating with the competent authorities to make this route a priority should be explored.

*Camille Brunel, SOS Méditerranée*



Picture: Fishing wooden boats in Senegal, Camille Brunel

## THE LIBYA-CRETE ROUTE (SAR 3.5)

The area around Darnah, Tobruk and the Libya-Egypt border region has been a departure place since several years.

While it had paused for some years, there was an increase in 2023, when mostly big fishing vessels (250-700ppl/boat) started to depart towards Calabria, Italy (550 nm/1000km).



In 2024, Alarm Phone started to receive more and more calls from boats leaving from the area towards the island of Crete-Gavdos in Greece which is around 180nm (330km) away.

**Arrivals on this route have increased sixfold over the past year.** Most of the arrivals are not recorded in Crete, but in the outlying island of Gavdos, which is an almost uninhabited island of 29.6 km<sup>2</sup> with around 100 residents and no infrastructure. Incoming migrants are transferred to Crete and then to the mainland.

- Total arrivals in **2023: 815 people**
- Total arrivals in **2024: 4847 people**
- From 1 January-16 February **2025, 748 people**

*(UNHCR figures)*

Alarm Phone received 27 cases on that route in 2024 with around 1500 people on board:

- Boat types: mostly rubber or wooden boats (including the typical Libyan made ones we know from SAR1/2), often unknown.
- Number of people on the boat varies from 20-150 people. Most of the boats carry 30-60 people.
- Nationalities: Mainly Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Sudan, Yemen.

This is a small part compared to all the arrivals towards Crete and most of the boats here don't reach out to Alarm phone.

As visible on the map below the route potentially crosses the 3 SAR zones of Libya, Egypt and Greece and also goes through an area where a lot of Merchant Vessels pass by. The merchant vessels' involvement is quite high in an overview of the outcomes:





In the past, people on the move would end up on Crete or Gavdos by accident, while heading to Italy. However, now they intentionally aim to go there. They want to arrive to Greece. The reasons are mainly four:

**1. The deal between Meloni and Haftar :** The general Haftar controls eastern Libya, and in 2023 he made a deal with the Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, to stop departures.

In 2023, lots of pullbacks and interceptions were recorded in that area carried out by the Tariq Ben Zeyad militia, sometimes inside the Maltese SAR, even inside the Greek SRR. (July 2023). On 13th March, 2024, Frontex announced that they recorded a 70% decrease on the Libya –Italy route and at the same time a 117% increase in arrivals in Crete. By the end of 2024, arrivals in Crete had increased sixfold!

It's clear that the rise in arrivals in Crete is linked to the decrease in arrivals in Italy from Tobruk. People on the move are trying to avoid Haftar's pullbacks, which are funded by the Italian state.

**2. The enormous impact of the Pylos shipwreck:** The fishing boat that sank near Pylos in June 2023 with 650 people dead or missing, was heading to Italy from Tobruk (a 10-day journey). Now, people are attempting shorter routes to the island of Crete which only takes 1 and a half days.

**3. Crete is excluded from the EU-Turkey deal:** The EU-Turkey deal foresees that asylum seekers have to stay in the Greek islands until their asylum application is examined. This means that they are issued with geographical restriction and they cannot leave the islands and go to the mainland. That's why the European Union built those monstrous, prison-like camps on Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Kos and Leros where the people on the move are trapped for months, even years. But in Crete, none of this is happening. There is no geographical restriction. There are no camps for asylum seekers. Instead, people are transferred directly to Athens.

**4. No established pushback regime in Crete:** So far, there is no pushback system in place on Crete. Unlike the Aegean Sea, where the Greek Coast Guard (GC) has been pushing people back at sea, abandoning them on life rafts, or even kidnapping them from land, there are no recorded pushbacks in Crete so far.

This is a relatively new route for the Greek government, and they haven't set up a pushback system there yet. Also, Turkey is much further away

from Crete, making pushbacks much harder compared to Lesbos or Samos who are a few miles away from Turkey.

**The big question is:** If this situation continues, will Crete be included in the concept of the EU- Turkey deal? Would that mean the creation of camps like the ones in the Greek islands?

It is unlikely. The EU seems more focused on supporting the Egyptian Coast Guard to increase interceptions. In March 2024, the EU signed a €7.4 billion deal with Egypt in exchange for tighter migration controls. Also, the tourist business capital on the island is very powerful and has blocked the possibility of establishing refugee camps in Crete.

#### ASSETS AT SEA:

- No NGO vessels in the area, as is the case throughout Greece.
- Gavdos is almost uninhabited, there is no infrastructure, no coastguard station, that's why all the first rescue response at sea is done by fishermen or merchant vessels sent by the Greek authorities. The Greek government is sending a new CG vessel to reinforce the Greek Coast Guards capacity. On many occasions, migrants arrive independently, they sleep in the wilderness, they light fires to get warm and the fishermen see them and warn the authorities. Sometimes, even navy frigates are sent to the do rescues.
- On 14th December, a big shipwreck was recorded near Gavdos with 6 dead and more than 40 people missing. According to survivor testimonies, the merchant vessel that was sent to do the rescue made a critical mistake, causing the migrant boat to capsize.
- The EU is responding to the continuous arrivals in Crete **by sending a new Frontex vessel**. The Greek government will also send a new CG vessel to reinforce the Greek Coast Guards capacity. According to the Greek media, the Frontex vessel, will probably be a Lithuanian High Seas Patrol Vessel, which will be based in Agia Galini and will patrol in the south.

Frontex drones and aircrafts are also present.

#### SITUATION ON THE GROUND:

Gavdos is almost uninhabited: there's no infrastructure. When migrants arrive, they sleep in abandoned buildings that the authorities have designated for this purpose before being transferred to Crete. In Crete, the situation isn't any better. There

is no infrastructure as well, no places to host incoming people, not even camps.

People sleep in a temporary shelter provided by the municipality. No organizations are there to give them clothes or shoes. On some occasions people stay with the same wet and dirty clothes for days. The only help comes from a few independent volunteers and activists from Chania, the nearest big town. They collect supplies and bring them to the shelter, but overall, the situation is really bad.

There is no medical care unless someone is literally dying, there is no protection for vulnerable people, no registration, nothing.

After 2-3 days, the Greek authorities transfer the people to the mainland in Greece, where they can finally register, apply for asylum, and access basic services.

We believe that the Greek government will not change this setup in the near future and create camps like those in the Aegean islands (Lesvos, Samos, etc). Instead, the government will likely:

- Keep transferring people to the mainland, as they do now.
- Strengthen cooperation with Egypt and Libya to stop the boats.

Survivors also reported that they have suffered **violence, torture and kidnapping** at the border between LY and Egypt. There are armed groups who kidnap them and demand ransoms. Many People were locked up for months and by the time they reach Greece, they are in a very bad condition.

*Iasonas Apostolopoulos (Mediterranea) and Yanek (Alarm Phone)*



*Picture: Migrants walk on the beach of Tripiti on Gavdos island, Greece, after they disembarked from a fishing boat, photo: EPA / VASSILIS MATHIOUDAKIS*



# FORCED TO DISAPPEAR

## RESEARCH, IDENTIFICATION, POSSIBLE FORENSICS ACTIONS ON BOARD: A CIVIL FLEET WORKSHOP

On October 10 and 11, 2024, the SABIR festival in Rome hosted a workshop organized by the Civil Fleet and attended by many of the NGOs involved in Search and Rescue in the Central Mediterranean. The workshop was held in response to a request from several organizations operating at sea to save lives. The civil fleet has indeed found itself in circumstance of recovering bodies at sea and to deal with the suffering of survivors who bear witness to the disappearance of their fellow travelers. During rescue operations, NGOs are constantly confronted with the possibility of having to recover bodies at sea: victims connected to the event for which they are intervening, or sometimes "isolated" bodies testifying to an invisible shipwreck. Occasionally, deaths occur on board, due to the critical state of health of those rescued.

Each organization has had to confront this situation at least once, deciding whether to recover victims or to take them on board, managing the suffering of loved ones, survivors, and its crew. They had to arrange the space on the boat in the long hours before disembarkation. The onboard doctor has had to examine the victim to confirm death, often under extremely difficult conditions, both materially and emotionally. The captain is responsible for handling the legal procedures and informing the authorities at

the port of disembarkation ensuring that they are prepared to receive the body(ies).

Pending disembarkation, after medical examinations, the victims are placed in body bags (which every boat now has on board), and deposited, if the boat has one, in cold rooms, to help preserve the body and facilitate identification activities for the authorities ashore. If the boat does not have a cold room, the bodies are deposited in a suitable space on the boat, out of the way to protect them and to limit the perception of their presence for the survivors, or placed outboard in smaller boats that are towed along.

Each experience is different, depending on the size and equipment of the boat, the conditions of intervention, the duration of the voyage to the port of disembarkation, the number of survivors rescued, and the number of bodies recovered. Yet, these situations occur quite frequently, forcing all organization to confront this possibility and anticipate the responsibility of caring of one or more bodies. Over the years, they have developed, or are in the process of developing, an operational protocol to standardize practices and deal with different situations, adapted to specific capabilities and in compliance with the maritime code.



Picture: CommémorAction in Kayar, Senegal, February 2025

However, it has appeared both useful and necessary to address legal constraints and obligations more organically and to question what can be done to go further, particularly in terms of participation in the body identification process and possibly in the collection of information on missing persons. This has become even more crucial as NGOs have realized that the authorities handle identification processes inconsistently and often hastily, due to the lack of resources and political will. In many countries - notably in Italy - identification is not mandatory but depends on the directives of the public prosecutor who is in charge of the investigation associated with the death. In Italy, between 2014 and 2019, 73% of bodies were buried without a name, and this percentage is still more or less the same today.

Caring for the bodies and respecting the dignity of the victims go hand in hand with the commitment to restoring their identities and allowing families to learn the fate of their loved ones. At the same time, while protecting the witnesses/survivors on board, while enabling their potential contribution to the identification of the victims should not be underestimated. The survivors should be supported in this effort if they wish to participate or are in a position to do so.

The workshop, which took place over two half-days, focused in its first part on possible forensic actions on board: with the participation of a forensic expert, the discussion explored the activities that can be carried out on board starting from the body recovery operations to be able to collect functional information for identification. To this end, it is proposed to insist on a holistic forensic approach, which can be practiced by crew members (depending on the technical characteristics of the vessel) and allows all functional elements to be taken into account in an initial "recognition" operation of the victim. This should facilitate subsequent identification operations carried out by the authorities on land.

Through this approach, which includes a precise body inspection procedure, the acknowledgement of survivors' testimony and the use of devices developed by research centers (INSA with ICRC) that can reconstitute an image of the victim's face, it is possible to initiate a "search" process for the victim's identity.

The second part of the workshop covered the legal obligations, constraints, and possibilities that define the boundaries of action and responsibilities of the crew, according to different scenarios. Several specialists present at the workshop offered to do a

mapping of the different scenarios that will be able to guide the organization through the actions to be carried out on board.

A common element of the two workshops was to evaluate all instruments and practices that can be activated onboard to facilitate identification, and crucially, how these connect with efforts on land. By collecting and documenting more comprehensive information and making it available to competent authorities or civil society organizations, NGOs can make a significant difference in identification processes.

The workshop acknowledged that hearing the testimony of survivors who knew the victims is not merely a forensic necessity - it represents a decolonial practice that inverts the traditional forensic paradigm. Rather than relying solely on physical traces that experts must interpret, this approach embraces equality with witnesses who, through their words, reconstruct both personal and collective histories of violence inflicted by border regimes.

This approach assumes that the production of information useful for identification should prompt authorities to take these preliminary activities into account and more effectively manage subsequent identification operations. Ensuring that the voices of those present at these tragedies are heard serves not only for identification purposes but becomes a crucial element in reconstructing truth and justice.

Furthermore, the civil fleet's connection with humanitarian and civil society actors on land enables contact with potential family members or relatives who could actively participate in formal identification operations. This transnational capacity for action—characteristic of the No Borders movement to which many rescue organizations belong—creates powerful coordination networks that can challenge institutional indifference.

This type of activation, requiring organized, trust-based networking, has already proved extremely valuable in numerous cases, particularly in anticipating operations and enabling family members to be present at disembarkation sites and involved in identification processes. The workshop concluded with a call for rescue NGOs and land-based activists to recognize and embrace the transnational coordination power they collectively hold, and to accept the responsibility of using it effectively to restore dignity to those who have lost their lives at Europe's maritime borders.

**Filippo Furri, anthropologist**



# INTERVIEW

## “THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY”

**ALLISON WEST, SENIOR LEGAL ADVISOR AT EUROPEAN CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS (ECCHR)**

*Founded in 2007, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) is an independent, non-profit organization based in Berlin dedicated to making injustice visible and enforcing human rights worldwide. Together with affected communities and partners around the globe, ECCHR uses legal means to challenge corporate exploitation, fortified borders, and impunity for grave international crimes.*

### **What are ECCHR’s main concerns regarding Europe’s current approach to migration and border control, and how do you work to address them?**

Instead of creating safe, legal pathways to protection, the EU and Member States employ deterrence, exclusion, and externalization. These practices rely on arbitrary and irregular handling of people on the move, facilitating secret detentions, torture and ill-treatment, expulsions, and a complete denial of access to legal safeguards. In the Central Mediterranean, Libyan and European actors cooperate to capture those fleeing by sea and systematically return them to arbitrary detention under conditions that amount to crimes against humanity.

As an organization that focuses on the law’s role as both a tool of repression and resistance, we work closely with survivors and movements to legally challenge Europe’s attempts to deny access to rights and render people rightless. By rigorously analyzing abuses/violations at borders, strategically litigating in multiple legal forums, and collaborating transnationally, we at ECCHR strive to hold those who benefit from these illegal practices to account – be it states, companies, or high-ranking individuals in governmental or non-governmental entities like Frontex.

### **Can you describe some examples of what legal tools and practices you use?**

One focus of our work is supporting individuals who have experienced pushbacks and border violence in [filing complaints](#) before human rights bodies like the European Court of Human Rights and different treaty bodies of the United Nations (UN). These cases aim to hold states accountable for these systematic pushback policies and challenge impunity for recurring violations at Europe’s borders. We have also [monitored trials](#) of members of the Civil Fleet and advocated for the rights of human rights defenders operating on the Mediterranean, including through [legal interventions](#).

Another one of our strategies is to fight pullbacks and associated abuses in the Central Mediterranean utilizing international criminal law (ICL), for instance at the International Criminal Court (ICC) or in national courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction. These efforts seek accountability for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. By focusing on individual criminal responsibility rather than states, this approach enables cases against high-ranking officials, including those from EU Member States and agencies like Frontex, which is, by design, difficult to litigate against as an entity. The ICL category of crimes against humanity also emphasizes the gravity and structural context of these crimes, allowing prosecutions to expose how systems of abuse function and how EU and Member State policies connect to the actions of individuals.

### **You have filed two major complaints to the International Criminal Court related to crimes against humanity perpetrated against migrants and refugees in Libya and the Central Mediterranean. What are their status and your expectations?**

ECCHR has submitted two Article 15 communications to the ICC as part of its ongoing investigation into the [Situation in Libya](#). Article 15 communications allow any individual, State, or non-governmental organization to send information on alleged crimes within the jurisdiction of the ICC to the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP). It’s then up to the ICC Prosecutor to decide which cases to pursue by applying for arrest warrants of alleged perpetrators, which if granted often remain under seal.

We made our first Libya-related [ICC submission in 2021](#), together with Lawyers for Justice in Libya and the International Federation for Human Rights. It highlighted the commission of unspeakable violence and abuse against people on the move in Libya, particularly in detention settings, as part of a discernible system of migrant exploitation that amounts, we argue, to the commission of crimes

against humanity and possible war crimes. It included in-depth witness testimony from 14 survivors and called on the ICC prosecutor to open an investigation into the responsibility of individuals within Libyan state authorities as well as non-state armed groups and militias.

Our [2022 submission](#) detailed how European and Libyan actors cooperate to capture migrants and refugees at sea and forcibly return them to Libyan detention and the system of abuse and exploitation outlined in our 2021 ICC filing. It showed how European actors have bolstered the so-called Libyan Coast Guard with funding, training, and equipment, while actively participating in apprehensions at sea by sharing boat locations. We argued that this material support formalized through agreements demonstrates a common plan resulting in crimes against humanity. We named 24 individuals, including 16 high-level EU and Member State officials as alleged co-perpetrators and urged the ICC Prosecutor to include interceptions at sea and European actors in its investigation. This submission would not have been possible without evidence from sea rescue and civil society organizations.

The ICC's investigation into the Situation in Libya is ongoing. We know that the OTP is looking into crimes against people on the move and gathering evidence, including survivor testimony. While we hope this leads to concrete cases, there have been major setbacks—most recently Italy's failure to comply with an ICC arrest warrant, allowing Osama Elmasry Njeem, wanted for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed at Tripoli's Mitiga Prison, to be flown back to Libya on an Italian state aircraft. This

incident highlights Libyan-European ties and the need for deeper ICC scrutiny of the role and legal responsibility of European actors. As this may be the final year of the Libya investigation, we urge the Court to take firm action to bring perpetrators, both Libyan and European, to justice.

**In October 2024 you co-organized a public event and workshops with Refugees in Libya. What motivated this collaboration and how do you view partnerships with self-organized groups like RiL?**

Our cooperation with RiL began in 2023 when we had the honor to host RiL co-founder David Yambio as a fellow at ECCHR. Throughout his fellowship, we explored avenues for legal accountability and began conducting outreach to survivors interested in legal action. In October 2024 we co-organized the event "From Tripoli to Berlin." Our motivation was to bring together different groups, including lawyers, survivors, activists, and members of the Civil Fleet, to think through possibilities and challenges to advance our work. We thought it was a great success! Cooperating with a broad network of actors is essential to our work, as we know law is only one tool in the fight for justice. Our cooperation with RiL, a survivor-led network that is unrelenting in its advocacy and well-connected to what is happening on the ground in Libya and Tunisia, is incredibly important. As our model of lawyering strives to be survivor- and movement-led, we deeply value RiL's expertise in determining strategic legal interventions and hope to continue our cooperation to amplify the aims and voices of survivors in the fight against impunity.



Picture: ECCHR



**Back to the legal level: what is the biggest challenge in your work in courts?**

At the ICC, the recent debacle with Italy's release of wanted Libyan actor Osama Elmasry Njeem demonstrates some of the challenges in apprehending suspects and ensuring cooperation of States with the ICC. The failure to transfer Njeem to the Hague had devastating effects for both the Libya investigation and for survivors seeking justice. Our ECCHR colleague and Italian lawyer Chantal Meloni has written a great overview of the incident [here](#). Other key challenges with the ICC include the length of investigations and trials, jurisdictional hurdles, resource limitations, and lack of transparency in decision-making. However, we believe we must continue to support these institutions while applying pressure for them to meet our demands.

**From the outside we see a labyrinth of legal levels and options: at the national, EU, and international levels. Do you favor certain legal institutions? If so, why?**

At ECCHR, we don't favor one legal institution but seek the most effective venue for each case and the aims of the survivors/groups pursuing it. While there are many legal options for addressing injustices at borders, our work on abuses against people on the move in Libya and the Mediterranean has primarily focused on the ICC for several reasons. Domestic prosecutions in Libya and Europe have largely failed to address the systematic nature of these crimes or hold high-level perpetrators accountable. Given the role of high-level actors and the structural dimension of these abuses, the ICC is uniquely positioned to investigate and prosecute those most responsible.

While some EU Member State judiciaries are investigating and prosecuting abuses against people on the move, they often focus narrowly on trafficking, overlooking the broader context of crimes against humanity. Worse, smuggling and trafficking laws are frequently misused to criminalize people on the move and those in solidarity with them, rather than holding European actors accountable for designing and implementing policies and practices known to enable and facilitate international crimes. Since national judiciaries overwhelmingly fail to examine the legal responsibility of high-ranking EU and Member State officials, an ICC investigation remains essential to break the cycle of impunity. At the same time, our approach complements the work of other lawyers and groups mounting legal challenges in other forums, and we recognize the importance of a multi-pronged strategy in the fight for justice.

**How strong is your coordination and cooperation with other NGOs and legal actors coming from civil society? Is it useful to have a variety of approaches and organizations?**

We see our legal work as driven by cooperation with survivors, affected communities, and partner organizations. The law can be a powerful tool in struggles for justice but it must be approached strategically and in service of those directly affected. We have already built invaluable relationships with RiL and other survivors, members of the Civil Fleet, other lawyers and legal organizations, and solidarity groups supporting people on the move. Given the current political climate, we see it as crucial to further strengthen and expand these connections to enhance collective efforts in challenging rightlessness and border violence.

**Activists have long sought a kind of archive of successful court cases and best legal practices in the area of refugee and migrant rights. Is it feasible and who could do it?**

A database compiling lessons from legal cases on the rights of people on the move across different national, regional, and international tribunals would be highly valuable. Given the research-intensive nature of such a project, it would likely be best led by a university or research institution. We would gladly contribute insights from our casework and see great potential in such a resource.

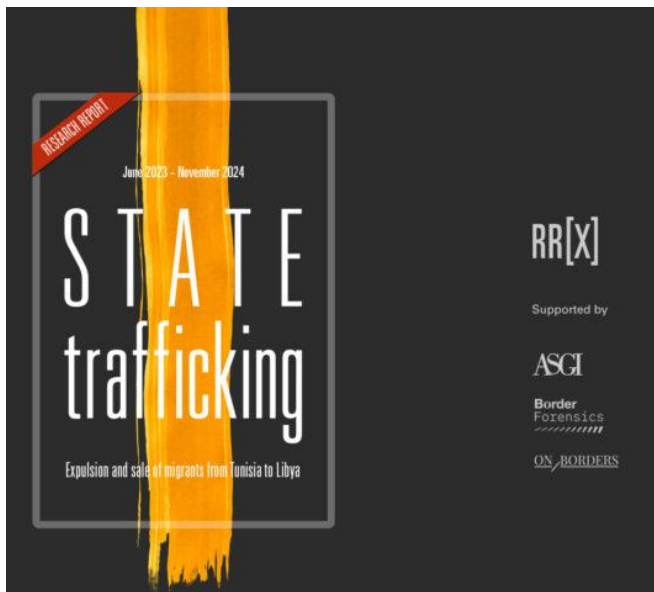
**What impact do rising right-wing policies and increasing racism have on legal struggles for migrant rights?**

An increasingly hostile environment and racist, dehumanizing rhetoric in politics have enabled policies focused on further criminalizing people on the move and those who support them, rather than seeking to protect human rights and the rule of law. The reforms of the Common European Asylum System, which weaken the rights of those who reach Europe and will make it even more difficult to access legal support, are a prime example. Some courts have normalized violent deterrence measures at Europe's borders with judgments that draw on the same logic and narratives, effectively restricting the rights of people on the move. This makes legal efforts all the more challenging, but all the more urgent, going forward.

**Thanks Allison for this interview!**

# REPORTS

## STATE TRAFFICKING: EXPULSION AND SALE OF MIGRANTS FROM TUNISIA TO LIBYA



The report presents 30 testimonies from migrants who were expelled from Tunisia to Libya between June 2023 and November 2024, highlighting a salient feature that appears in their accounts: the sale of human beings at the border by Tunisian police and military apparatuses as well as the interconnection between the infrastructure behind expulsions and the kidnapping industry in Libyan prisons. In this sense, the report documents events and situations that in the social sciences and international law are classified as "state crimes."

**"We claim a legal humanitarian corridor for all the witnesses of the report still in Libya and Tunisia! Their voices must be audible before EU courts!"**

FULL REPORT - <https://statetrafficking.net/>

## RESISTANCE AT THE BORDER, STORIES OF LIFE AND STRUGGLE BETWEEN ITALY AND TUNISIA

### MEM-MED, RIL AND REFUGEES IN TUNISIA

In December of last year, the association [Mem.Med](#), Memoria Mediterranea launched the monthly column Resistances at the Borders: Stories of Life and Struggle Between Tunisia and Italy, publishing an introduction along with the first story, titled "Battles of the Unknown".

The column was created as a space for collective writing and raising awareness, where activists, Mem.Med members, and people on the move collaborate to gather and share lived experiences at the borders. From a perspective that starts at the margins, Resistances at the Borders restores dignity and value to the lives of those facing the migratory journey, while denouncing systemic violence and the injustices of border management policies. This is the second story in the series.

**"Through this publication, we aim to provide a critical perspective on what is happening in the olive groves of Sfax while also amplifying the voices of those who continue to fight for a more just world. Because remembering these acts of resistance is itself a political act: telling their stories means refusing to let them disappear."**



FULL REPORT

<https://memoriamediterranea.org/en/between-asphalt-and-dust-repression-protests-and-migrant-self-management-on-the-margins-of-tunisia/>



# CRIMINALISATION

## SIX YEARS OF EL HIBLU 3: A STORY OF STRUGGLE AND ALLYSHIP!

**On 28 March 2025 we acknowledge the 6th anniversary of Abdalla, Amara, and Kader arriving in Malta. Six years of dreams are on hold. Six years of legal limbo. Six years of going to court and leaving frustrated. An anniversary that carries a lot of pain but also six years of strength, resilience, and friendship.**

Abdalla, Amara, and Kader reached Malta on 28 March 2019. They were arrested, accused of terrorism, hijacking a ship, and threatening a crew on the tanker *El Hiblu 1*, then put on trial by Malta. They were among 100 migrants rescued by a tanker, which afterward attempted to bring them back to Libya, the place they had tried to escape from. The migrants protested a forced return to Libya, requesting a safe passage to Europe which led the tanker to turn around towards Malta. Malta's Armed Forces stormed the ship upon entering Maltese territorial waters in the early morning hours on 28 March. The Armed Forces found no violent resistance, yet despite that, Abdalla, Amara, and Kader were arrested and accused of severe crimes once the tanker docked.

After seven months of detention, they were released on bail – but that only marked the beginning of their ongoing legal limbo. The *El Hiblu 3* endure one challenge after another, whilst maintaining a stable and “responsible” lifestyle: After work, they sign in at the police station, go home, pray, cook, rest, and go to work again. Once a month this pattern is disrupted when they are called in to attend court. It became sadly a normality in their young lives to be stuck in a legal nightmare that has put their lives on hold, depriving them of making plans for their lives, such as attending school or getting a driver's license. Their bail conditions don't allow them any light teenage days, nights out, or a visit to the coast.

On 6 November 2024, the *El Hiblu 3* were due back in the Courts of Justice in Valletta. Julienne from Dance Beyond Borders came to attend and found herself seated inside the courtroom, witnessing the proceedings firsthand. As Julienne entered, she realized it was her first time in a courtroom.

*“Reflecting on my own privilege, I was struck by my naivety; I had never grasped the rigor of courtroom decorum – strict rules for attire, behavior, and conduct. The formality unsettled me, as I usually associate such attire with celebrations and*

*ceremonies. It felt oddly incongruous, almost surreal, to see people so formally dressed for a hearing against three young men facing charges of terrorism – a trial that should never have started. Absorbing the scene in the courtroom, I couldn't help but feel the weight of it all – how the fates of Abdalla, Amara, and Kader rest in the hands of Judges elevated on their platform supporters, lawyers, and the defendants layered below them. Sitting there, I felt a strange disconnect – the proceedings presented as precise and factual, yet it's clear that facts can be shaped to support varying perspectives. People interpret situations through the lens of their own history, ethics, and experiences.”*

This hearing, one among countless others over the last six years[1], focused on appeals by the defense, challenging Malta's jurisdiction over the case. The appeal followed a dismissed plea to the charges in Criminal court from May 2024 and had moved to the Courts of Appeal to challenge whether Malta could proceed events that took place on the *El Hiblu 1* between the 26 and 28 March 2019, given that the alleged crimes happened outside of Malta's territorial waters. We listened as the defense argued that this case, which had persisted for so long, was beyond Malta's rightful authority to prosecute and that one has the right to protect themselves from an illegal return to war-torn Libya. The defense stressed that what is being called “terrorism” in the *El Hiblu 3* case was a non-violent protest by migrants who were rescued off the Libyan coast on 26 March 2019.

On 22 January 2025, we entered the courtroom again, hoping for a decision on the matter of jurisdiction. Within seconds, our hope was shattered into a thousand shards, like fallen glass. The session was concluded after 30 seconds with a dismissal of the appeal by the Court of Criminal Appeals and thus confirming the decision of the Maltese Criminal Court. The large group of supporters, together with Amara and Abdalla, left the court in consternation.

The case of Malta against the *El Hiblu 3* had been split into two different proceedings after Kader didn't appear for a hearing in winter 2023. While Abdalla and Amara continued their frequent visits in the Courts of Valletta, Kader was not seen. Now, he appeared in the UK in the first week of February after having been arrested. A first hearing regarding pending extradition to Malta took place on Monday,

17 February 2025 in London. He will remain in custody and has to attend six more sessions in court a decision on his extradition will be made in September 2025.

Throughout the El Hiblu 3 trial in Malta, roundabout 50 hearings, six years of legal limbo, two years of delay in inviting eyewitnesses from the rescued people to testify, and infinite delays of hearings and presenting the Bill of Indictment, it is difficult not to wonder about the overarching context of Malta's unique geopolitical situation, movement of people and the sea and the lives of the three now young men and what they could be like if they weren't caught up in legal limbo.

Malta's vastly expanded SAR (Search and Rescue) region stretches all across the Mediterranean basin and covers some 260,000 square kilometers[2]. For years now, Malta has fallen short of its SAR responsibilities, failing to ensure timely rescues and safe disembarkation of people in distress in the Med. Rather than providing support, Malta excels in preventing the initiation of needed rescue measures, relies on Italy, and cooperates with Libyan actors and authorities to intercept migrants to return them to Libya – a place described by international stakeholders as “Hell on Earth”[3][4] for people in distress.

When Abdalla, Amara, and Kader departed from Libya they were teenagers and children of 19, 15 and 16 years of age. When they arrived in Malta two days later, they were thrown into a high-security prison wing for adults. The European border regime stole 18 years of their youth from the young men, their agency, and the ability to grow up at their own pace. When we met in late 2019 and early 2020 to decide on a collaborative campaign – the Free El Hiblu 3-campaign – sitting in a small café in the village of Hamrun, Malta, deciding to stand together whatever may come and however long it would take, we met three children. We decided to stay next to each other to demand justice and a fair trial for the three youngsters but also to build an infrastructure of safety and care. Today, we call each other family. And we're happy to see, that the work of the *El Hiblu 3* campaign has influenced many additional actors over the years who started to make it their personal mandate to stand against the injustice, Abdalla, Amara, and Kader are facing.

Actors, many of whom are locals, working outside of the legal and political fields, who came into contact with this story and feel appalled at the hypocrisy of their authorities stance..

*“As Maltese people working within the Arts and Cultural Sector, the greatest tragedy is not just the criminalization of Abdalla, Amara, and Kader – it is*



6

YEARS OF  
EL HIBLU 3:  
STRUGGLE  
& ALLYSHIP

18

YEARS OF  
STOLEN YOUTH

+ 50

SCHEDULED  
HEARINGS

over  
**2000 days**  
in legal limbo



*the failure of the nation to uphold the fundamental values of solidarity and justice.”*

We have seen too many people die in Maltese waters or be pushed back; the cries for help ignored, swallowed by the silence of bureaucracy. Malta, once a nation of seafarers, has turned its back on those in need, neglecting its duty to rescue, delaying urgent calls, and choosing indifference over humanity.

*It is as if we have forgotten who we are. “Every Maltese family knows someone who has left – to the North Africa, UK, Australia, Canada, the Americas and elsewhere. We were and are migrants ourselves, seeking better futures beyond our shores. And yet, the Maltese government does everything in its power to block others from doing the same. Where is the empathy that should come from our own history? How can a people, shaped by movement, by colonization, by opportunity for a better life, now choose to deny others the same chance at survival and life.”*

Now, with the sixth anniversary of the El Hiblu 3 approaching, we will again stand close together in

solidarity and uplift our voices to say loud and clear “Free the El Hiblu 3. Preventing a push-back to Libya is not a crime”.

**Join our work and reach out via socials or website if you want to get involved and support our work!**

#### ■ DANCE BEYOND BORDERS

<https://www.dancebeyondborders.org>

insta: @dancebeyondborders

#### ■ EL HIBLU 3 CAMPAIGN

<https://elhiblu3.info/support>

insta, bsky, x: @elhiblu3

[1] [ElHiblu3.info/hearings](https://elhiblu3.info/hearings)

[2] <https://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/474/4742149010/html/>

[3] <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/01/21/no-escape-hell/eu-policies-contribute-abuse-migrants-libya>

[4] [https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Redacted\\_Art\\_15\\_Communication\\_to\\_the\\_ICC\\_on\\_crimes\\_against\\_refugees\\_and\\_migrants\\_in\\_Libya.pdf](https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Redacted_Art_15_Communication_to_the_ICC_on_crimes_against_refugees_and_migrants_in_Libya.pdf)

## 2,127 DAYS OF LIMBO AND AN UPCOMING JURY TRIAL

We were devastated and angry at the Appeal Court’s decision on 22 January 2025. The Court rejected the appeal by the El Hiblu 3’s lawyers arguing that the matter of jurisdiction, among others, should be considered at trial. The case will now likely continue to jury trial, although it is yet unclear at what speed that will happen.

After the hearing, we came together in Valetta in front of the court to renew our promise to stand with and fight for Abdalla, Amara, and Kader. We marked the 2,127 days of criminalization they have endured with powerful words from Malta’s President Emeritus Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, Regine Psaila from the African Media Association, Prof. Maria Pisani from the University of Malta, and William Grech from Kopin. The event was supported by Moviment Graffiti.

**The Coalition expresses solidarity with Kader, who was arrested in February in the UK and remains detained there. We will continue to support him in any way we can!**

**WEBSITE** <https://elhiblu3coalition.org/solidarityprotest/>



# AMPLIFYING VOICES

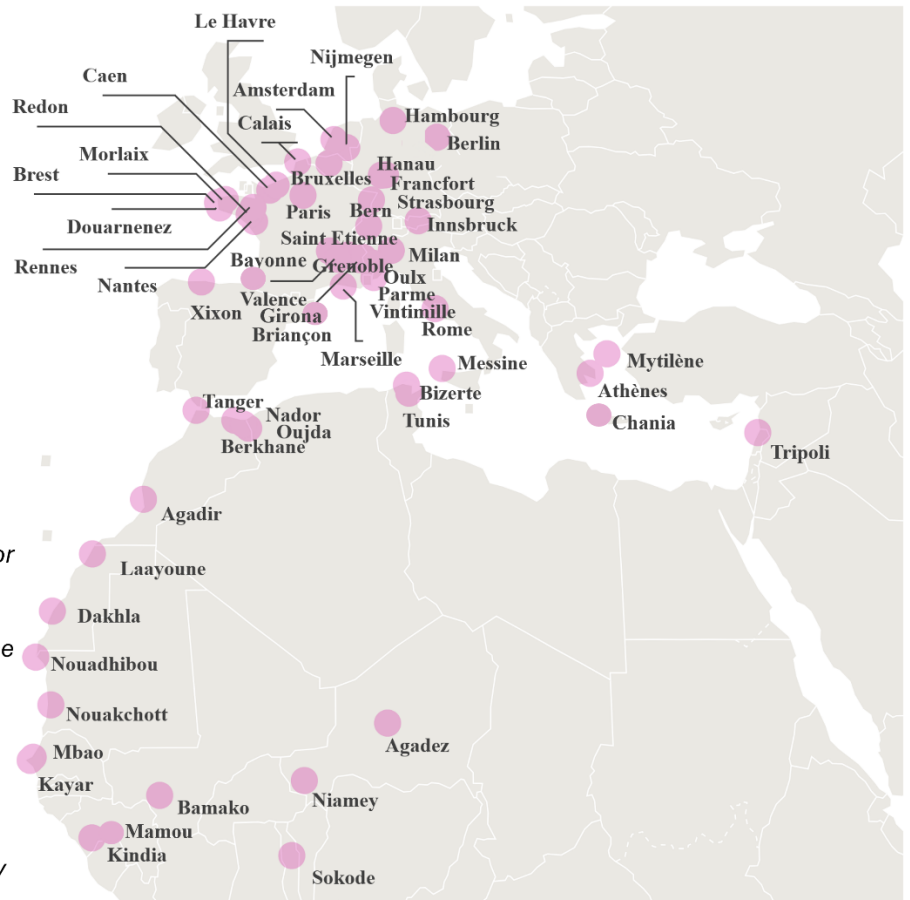
## REPORT OF COMMEMOR' ACTIONS - 6TH FEBRUARY



2025

**We won't forgive,  
we won't forget !  
Freedom of  
Movement !**

*With our term "CommemorAction" we offer a promise: We will not forget those who have lost their lives or went missing and we will fight against murderous border regimes. We will provide a space for remembrance and we will collectively build something from our grief. We will not be alone and we will not give up. We will continue to fight for freedom of movement and human dignity for all in our daily lives !*



Cities in which Commemorations were held in February 2025

### **WORLD DAY OF ACTION AGAINST THE BORDER DEATH REGIME AND TO DEMAND TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND REPARATIONS FOR MIGRATION VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

On February 6, 2024, a major transnational mobilization marked the 10th anniversary of Commemor-Action. On February 6, 2025, many people across the world further amplified this mobilization in support of the families of those who have died or disappeared during migration.

For more than thirty years, the direct or indirect violence of border regimes has continued to cause death and disappearances along migratory routes. Shipwrecks occur in succession, often marked by the lack of assistance and, at times, the active involvement of Coast Guards and Frontex. The number of people disappearing without a trace, either at sea or in the desert, keeps increasing. Meanwhile, efforts by authorities to search for and identify bodies are often hasty and fail to involve the families affected by these losses.

For more than thirty years, families and loved ones, associations, and all those fighting for equal mobility rights have continuously demanded truth and justice for these victims. They have highlighted the responsibilities of racist migration policies, worked to expose these responsibilities, and supported families and loved ones in their painful search for the missing and identification of victims.

Starting in 2024, the Commemor-Action network launched [a website](https://commemoraction.net/6-feb-2025/) to compile mobilizations held annually on February 6. The platform also aims to highlight the collective, coordinated, and shared dimensions of these actions. These mobilizations reflect the unwavering commitment of associations, collectives, and, above all, families seeking truth and justice.

**WEBSITE - <https://commemoraction.net/6-feb-2025/>**



Agadir, Morocco



Amsterdam, Netherlands







Grenoble, France



Kindia, Guinea



Bizerte, Tunisia





# MOBILISATIONS

## LIBYA: AFTER THE DISCOVERY OF MASS GRAVES, EU FUNDING SHOULD "SAVE LIVES AND OPEN UP SAFE ROUTES"

More than 30 organizations, including Statewatch, have called on the European Commission to use its funding for immigration control in Libya "to save lives and to provide alternatives to dangerous journeys." The call comes after the discovery of two mass graves in Libya, containing the bodies of almost 50 people believed to have been migrants and refugees.

*"Our thoughts are with the families of the victims, and with all those who have loved ones missing in similar circumstances, whose situation is often worsened by a lack of access to procedures for reporting, identifying, and accessing information about missing people.*

*In Libya the torture and killing of migrants in detention, their abandonment at sea or in the desert; being held in conditions akin to slavery; being subject to starvation and other serious human rights violations have been documented extensively by the UN's Independent Fact Finding Mission on Libya and other bodies.*

*It is clear that European Union migration funding to Libya, as well as migration funding to Libya from EU member states including Italy and France, has not delivered on its promise to improve conditions for people seeking safety.*

*A decade on from the Mediterranean's deadliest shipwreck off the Libyan coast, refugees in Libya remain subject to conditions that no human being should endure. Often, these conditions are imposed by forces which receive European public funds and support.*

*The European Commission reportedly took steps recently to review its funding arrangements with Tunisia after revelations of abuses carried out by security forces there. In the wake of these discoveries, and following last year's European Court of Auditors finding that the EU's Libya funding fails to address human rights risks, the EU should follow suit in Libya.*

*Funding should instead be used to save lives and to provide alternatives to dangerous journeys by ensuring safe routes for people to escape Libya."*

**19 February 2025**

### SIGNATORIES

<https://www.statewatch.org/news/2025/february/libya-after-discovery-of-mass-graves-eu-funding-should-save-lives-and-open-up-safe-routes/>



Picture: CommemorAction in Innsbruck, Austria, February 2025

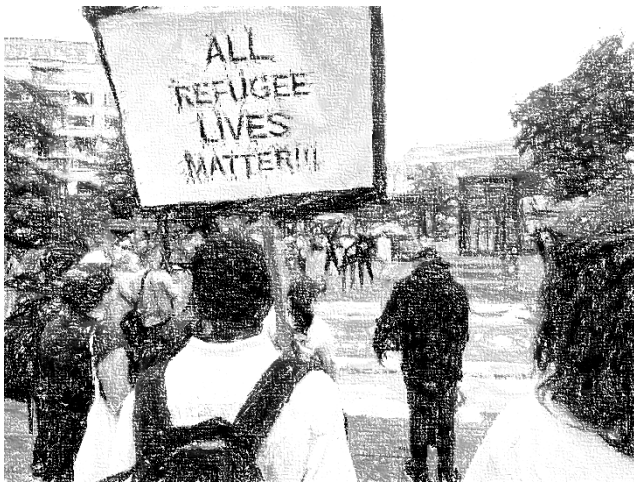


# CALL TO ACTION: FREE MOVEMENT! OPEN BORDERS. END DEATHS.

## 10 YEARS AFTER THE SUMMER OF MIGRATION

### First Invitation for a Transnational Chain of Actions culminating in September 2025

2025 marks the anniversary of the most dystopian and utopian events we have seen at the borders of Europe. We want to recall these events to denounce the lethal European border regime, and to reclaim the possibility that it can be overcome by freedom of movement for all and solidarity with people on the move. We want to invite a collective process, in which we aim for a decentralized transnational mobilization with multifaceted actions in the summer and autumn of 2025.



On April 18, 2015, the catastrophe that was waiting to happen after Italy and the EU ended proactive rescue operations, materialized. A fishing vessel capsized in the middle of the night in the waters between Libya and Italy. More than 1,100 people (from across Africa and the Indian subcontinent) sunk within minutes. This shipwreck caused the largest loss of life in recent Mediterranean history. The families of the deceased and disappeared continue to mourn their loved ones. We have not forgotten either. Their memory strengthens our determination to struggle against the EU's deadly border regime!

Following this policy-driven catastrophe, the EU did not end its discriminatory and militarised migration policies, which force illegalized migrants from most of the world to embark on dangerous journeys, and neither did it reinstate proactive rescue missions. As a result, border deaths have continued, and more than 30,000 deaths have been recorded over the last 10 years across the sea. But this shipwreck did spark the outrage of ordinary citizens, who decided to act in solidarity with migrants and to try and fill the lethal rescue gap created by state policies. In the summer of 2015, they deployed civilian rescue vessels which

soon became a veritable flotilla! The flotilla has persisted in its action to this day, despite the increasing criminalization of rescue. At sea, as on firm land, the multiple practices and infrastructures of solidarity that have emerged are essential to support migrants' movement and to fight death!

In the summer of 2015, in the Eastern Mediterranean, people on the move, mainly Syrians, but also Afghans and those of other nationalities, began crossing in greater numbers. From the Greek coasts, they trekked across the Balkans and continued to overcome one border after another on their way to northwest Europe. At the beginning of September 2015 – with the historical “march of hope” from Budapest – the European border regime temporarily collapsed. For a few months, migrants moved freely across Europe, even using public buses and trains to reach their destinations, where they were welcomed by solidarity movements in many cities. During this summer of migration, open borders and freedom of movement for all were no longer slogans or distant utopias but a lived reality. And while there were shipwrecks in the Aegean because migrants crossed a shorter maritime space, their travel was self-organized and happened in broad daylight, the Mediterranean was safer that summer than at any point in the last decades.

The Summer of Migration taught us a simple lesson: Migrant deaths are not inevitable! They could become history tomorrow! Without the EU's segregating visa- and border regime nobody would use unseaworthy boats or dangerous routes. Smugglers would cease to exist, as their service would no longer be necessary. This lesson was confirmed in 2022 when refugees from Ukraine could move and settle freely all over Europe. No death at borders, no smugglers needed. Open borders = end deaths! This is the powerful equation we derive from our experience.

The Summer of Migration was unexpected. It created a temporary reality that only months before seemed unimaginable. Today, in a context of mounting racism and fascist movements and as the EU deploys its war on migration across Europe's borders, these memories appear as something from another time and world. It is our imagination itself that seems bordered by the violence of our dystopian present.



But 2015 is still with us! The composition and fabric of our societies have been deeply transformed and made more diverse and beautiful for that. Self-organized movements, solidarity networks, and support projects that emerged 10 years ago still exist and persist despite criminalization. Freedom of movement is seized and practiced by migrants every day as they cross borders at the risk of their lives.

We want to raise our voices together, as loud as possible, to break the normalization of migrants' deaths. We mourn our brothers and sisters, and we refuse to accept that these deaths continue! We want to make visible the continuous struggles for the right to move and stay, to come and to go! We may be a minority in increasingly racist societies, but we exist, and together we can fight back against racism and fascism! We want to come together, and through common struggle, create a space for joy and hope in these dark times. Struggling in solidarity with people on the move must be a central component of the struggle against fascism today!

With this vision of struggle, we want to invite all refugee and migrant organizations, all networks of solidarity and support to join and prepare a transnational chain of decentralized activities

throughout the coming summer and culminating in September 2025.

10 years after the 18 April shipwreck and the Summer of Migration, we want to say: We refuse this deadly and unjust border regime! We refuse and resist deportations and detention, against push backs and the criminalization of migration. Migrant deaths are not inevitable! Freedom of movement is a possibility, we saw it, and we see it every day in the cracks of Europe's borders! Solidarity still exists and can be the basis for a beautiful society in which all can live free and equal!

3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2025

***Coalition for Free Movement***

**Composed by members of** Afrique Europe Interact, Border Forensics, LeaveNoOneBehind, Louise Michel, Maldusa, migration control, Mediterraneo Saving Humans, no one is illegal, Refugees in Libya, Sea Watch, WatchTheMed Alarm Phone, Welcome to Europe, We'll Come United

**Join the process!**

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