



Civil MRCC

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

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# ECHOES

## From the Central Mediterranean



People on the move arrived in Lampedusa, September 2023. Photo: Maldusa

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## STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

With 112 landings and more than 5000 people on the move reaching Lampedusa in one single day, the 12th of September 2023 marked a new level of breaking through the Central Mediterranean borders. While we have already highlighted the tenacity of refugees and migrants in our last issues with reports and pictures from the last months, in September the dynamics reached another peak point. It remembers - not in its dimension but in its moments and spirit - the summer of migration in the Aegean Sea and on the Balkan route in 2015: a volatile situation of, on the one hand, humanitarian crises, border violence, and deaths at sea, and on the other hand, the powerful struggle for freedom of movement with thousands of people overcoming the violent and racist border regime.

Since the beginning of the year 2023:

- 132,146 people arrived in Italy by boat, a significant number of whom **arrived autonomously** (UNHCR figure until the 24th of September)
- 11,197 people were **rescued by the civil fleet** from more than 180 boats in distress (CMRCC figures)
- 10,900 people were **pushed back** to Libya after they were intercepted by the EU-supported so-called Libyan Coast Guard (UNHCR figures as of September) and 39,568 people were intercepted by the Tunisian authorities (FTDES figures until 31st of August)
- 2,093 people who fled Libya **died** or are **reported missing** (IOM figures until 23rd September) and same for 958 people who fled Tunisia (FTDES figures until 31st of August). Those figures do not take into account invisible shipwrecks.

**“ a volatile situation of, on the one hand, humanitarian crises, border violence, and deaths at sea, and on the other hand, the powerful struggle for freedom of movement with thousands of people overcoming the violent and racist border regime ”**



# LATEST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

## THE DYNAMICS OF STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

*By Sophie-Anne Bisiaux, Giuseppe Caccia, Chiara Denaro and Hagen Kopp*

### THE MANUFACTURED CRISIS AND THE SOLIDARITY RESPONSE IN LAMPEDUSA

In the week of the 11th to the 17th of September 2023, more than 11,560 people made it bravely to Lampedusa. Not all who tried succeeded. Some were intercepted by the Libyan and Tunisian authorities and pushed back to the places they were trying to escape from. Some died, either during rescue or shortly after disembarkation. A six-month-old baby was amongst the latter.

With a capacity of 350 places only, the Lampedusa Hotspot could not host what would average at around **7000 people simultaneously on the island**. As a result, the main gate gave way, allowing people to walk free in the city. This was a great rupture with years of incarceration and invisibilization of people on the move transiting through the island. At the same time, it showed yet **another failure of the so-called “hotspot approach”**. The main requests of people coming to the island were for food and water. Hunger prevented some of them from being able to properly walk and speak. A 15-year-old had a towel tight around his stomach, in order to not feel hunger. His friend, just a year older, had a medical certificate in his hands stating: *“Found unconscious in the street. Severe dehydration and undernourishment. Drip administered.”*

Meeting people in the streets of Lampedusa not only showed (as usual) serious obstacles in accessing legal information and international protection, but also the violation of basic human rights such as access to water and food. Hundreds of people tried to rest along the road leading to the hotspot, on cots or on the ground, with a severe shortage of toilets and any kind of shelter. People were exposed to the inhumane and degrading treatment not far from what they had chosen to flee.

Against this background, Lampedusa citizens and local associations tried to fill the gap left by the state by organizing food distribution at the church and – after it was no longer accessible due to police orders – along the streets and at the commercial pier, where people waited for transfers by ferry. In a statement signed by more than 80 organizations, civil society expressed its deep concern at the security response of European states, the crisis of reception, and

reaffirmed its solidarity with people on the move arriving in Europe (Cf. *Joint Statement “Arrivals in Lampedusa: Solidarity and resistance in the face of Europe’s reception crisis!”*).

On September 16th, citizens arranged a huge demonstration during which around 600 people stopped the arrival of a Red Cross truck in fear that they were transporting infrastructure to build a new camp with a 5000-place capacity. Their main claim was the **de-militarization of the island** along with calls from some to **“stop the invasion”**, where **“the invaders” were not people on the move, but police officers and militaries**.

For the first time in years, the media narrative on Lampedusa showed collective cooking and eating, migrants playing football and dancing in the streets together with tourists and citizens. Racist discourse was marginal and mutual aid and solidarity were at the core. **For a while, their presence in Lampedusa stopped being invisible and was accepted by the population who “had the reception in its blood” and “had been teaching others how to welcome people”**.

*„...Over the past two days, however, without police teams in manhunt mode, Lampedusa streets, public spaces, benches and bars have been filled with encounters, conversations, pizzas and coffees offered by local inhabitants. Without hotspots and segregation mechanisms, Lampedusa becomes a space for enriching encounters and spontaneous acts of solidarity between locals and newly arrived people. Trays of fish ravioli, arancini, pasta, rice and couscous enter the small room next to the church, where volunteers try to guarantee as many meals as possible to people who, taken to the hotspot after disembarkation, had been unable to access food and water for three days. These scenes were unthinkable only a few days before...”*

**Source:** <https://www.maldusa.org/l/the-fall-of-the-lampedusa-hotspot-people-s-freedom-and-locals-solidarity/>

People on the move arrived in Lampedusa, September 2023. Photo: Maldusa



**The visit of Meloni and Von Der Leyen in Lampedusa on the 17th of September represented an abrupt return to an unacceptable normality.** The door of the hotspot closed again, and 1,700 people remained confined inside overcrowded and dirty conditions. During the visit, a police cordon prevented migrants from approaching the main door, which had been pulled open for the authorities' parade. The long road to the hotspot was empty again, and its crossing was barred by the army. A similar transformation had taken place at the Favalaro pier, made presentable again after days of indecency and dehumanization, with hundreds of people forced to stay there for hours, with no access to food, sanitation, and proper medical care.

**The 10 points action plan, which was presented by the EU commissioner in Lampedusa at this occasion includes nothing new and shows, on the contrary, the will of the EU and Italy to manufacture a mobility crisis (cf. legal fragment).** In 2018, 150.000 people had managed to reach Italy by sea, but only 9.000 people had to pass through Lampedusa. While at that time SAR policies foresaw disembarkation of rescued people across southern Italy, the current lack of a proactive search and rescue for most of the migrants' boats in distress just produces the concentration of sea arrival to Lampedusa in an almost autonomous way.

While people continue to reach Lampedusa, another crack has weakened Europe's violent border regime, this time caused by the contradictions within right-

wing governments in the EU. Meloni's refusal to accept deportations back to Italy has thus effectively collapsed Dublin-Italy. According to the Interior Ministry spokesperson from Germany, up until July no more than nine Dublin transfers to Italy had taken place. Furthermore, those transfers concerned persons who traveled to Italy voluntarily and independently, a good piece of news for all those arriving in Italy and willing to travel on to other countries within the EU.

**Nevertheless, on various levels the situation is moving in the direction of a worsening and more brutal European border regime.**

#### **HARASSMENT OF THE CIVIL FLEET**

Since mid-August, the Italian State's permanent war against civil sea rescue activities seems to have entered a new escalation phase (cf. *Statement "Urgent warning"*). After the period between July and the first days of August during which even the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre - faced both with the overwhelming number of arrivals and cases of distress along the Tunisian route southwest of Lampedusa as well as objective difficulties of intervention by the coast guard and Guardia di Finanza who were short of means, men, and even fuel - had directly involved the largest and smallest vessels of the civilian fleet in rescue operations around the island, the Meloni government "pulled its ears" to the Coast Guard.

What is left for Meloni? Having verified the impracticality of the “naval blockade,” closed ports, and discriminatory landings, what remains is the obstinate and senseless reaffirmation of the “State monopoly on sea rescue,” which is transformed into the punitive use of last January's Piantedosi Decree: assignment of increasingly distant ports, administrative detentions of ships in the case of real or presumed disobedience of the authorities' orders, up to the warning made to Mediterranean's ship Mare Jonio to "disembark the rescue equipment or we will arrest you" (cf. *Statement "Remove the rescue equipment or we will arrest you" : The Italian Government's threat against the Mare Jonio*).

**These attempts to harass and criminalize the Civil Fleet will not reduce arrivals.** Meloni and her interior minister know very well that only five to seven percent of arrivals are completed by civil rescue ships: the vast majority are either picked up by the Italian Coast Guard a few nautical miles off Lampedusa or land on the coast entirely autonomously. On the one hand, it is obviously a matter of pretending to their own voters that they are capable of acting, at least when it comes to confrontation with the NGOs. On the other hand, it is also a matter of weakening the important function of monitoring and publicly documenting permanent human rights violations at sea.

Particularly serious are the grounds on which Sea-Watch's fast boat Aurora was detained for 20 days - along with Sea-Eye-4 and Open Arms - for its refusal to disembark people rescued in the Tunisian port of Zarzis. As has happened since 2017, Italian governments seek to construct a “fait accompli” and then turn it into a formal involution of international law: in this case, also thanks to the ambiguities of UN organizations, they hope to arrive at the recognition of Tunisia as a safe landing place, despite racist violence and proven violations of fundamental rights.

### **MORE EFFECTIVE PUSH BACK COLLABORATION**

In the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of Echoes, we reported in the context of an article on SAR 3 on the appearance of a new push back actor in Benghazi, a militia called Tareq Bin Zayed Brigade. During their operations in the last weeks they not only towed a vessel with 500 people from the middle of the Maltese SAR back to Libya, but even carried out the abduction of 110 people from a boat that had started in Lebanon and never touched the Libyan SAR. **These interceptions obviously took place in strong collaboration with authorities in Italy, Malta and the EU (Frontex)**, who do not by any means omit the chance to stop refugees and migrants from reaching European shores. The brigade is under the control of Haftar, a strongman in eastern Libya, who was welcomed by Meloni in Rome in May 2023.



*Interception of ~250 people in distress by a Haftar's Tariq Ben Zayed militia vessel in July 2023. Photo: Seabird 2, Sea Watch*

## DEPORTATIONS TO TUNISIA

We learned from several reports that immediately after transfers to Sicily, Tunisian nationals in particular were singled out from time to time and detained for deportation. **For many years, the largest number of deportations in Italy were back to Tunisia: in 2022, this was about 2300 people.**

According to an older agreement from the end of 2011, every week two charter deportation flights go from Palermo to the airport in Tabarka, about 180 km west of Tunis. In each plane of the airline Volotea about 60 people are forced to be “repatriated,” often after they are being imprisoned in detention centers (CPRs) for a certain time. For a few months now a third deportation flight has been taking place each week. It will be important to monitor these inhumane practices in more detail and understand if authorities are trying to set an example which they can re-use for other nationalities.

## THE „FUNNEL“ OF LAMPEDUSA AND THE BRUTAL GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE: NEW DETENTION CAMPS IN ITALY

The situation that arose in Lampedusa in mid-September has several causes: first is the fact that in the face of constant police raids and widespread racist incidents against people from sub-Saharan Africa, every opportunity is used to try to leave Tunisia and cross the sea to Europe.

Second is the way in which Italian authorities organize rescues: according to statistics (Matteo Villa - ISPI), in 2015, 150,000 people landed in Italy, but only 9,000 arrived in Lampedusa, while today against the 160,000 expected annual landings in Italy, 100,000 arrive directly in Lampedusa. The reason for this is that for some time now, the Italian Coast Guard and Navy have stopped carrying out rescues on the high seas off the coasts of Libya and Tunisia, with large vessels capable of transporting people immediately to Sicily and the Italian mainland. **Thus, Lampedusa has become a real “funnel,” ever narrowing.**

This situation is aggravated by the crisis of the reception system at the national level: since 2018 with Salvini's “Security Decrees,” the resources for reception facilities have been heavily cut and the conditions of access to the system further restricted by the recent “Cutro Decree”. The result is that the number of arrivals cannot be absorbed in a timely manner, a result partly suffered and partly constructed by the Italian Government which, in this way, can continue to show the “theater of invasion.”

An example of this is the situation in Porto Empedocle (south of Sicily) where, faced with the dramatic inadequacy of the reception facility for people transferred from Lampedusa as a first stop, hundreds of people on the move rebelled and abandoned the facility, heading autonomously North. Similar cases are occurring all over Sicily (Caltanissetta, Pozzallo, etc.) and all over Italy.

*Local solidarity in Lampedusa with people on the move, September 2023  
Photo: Sea-Watch.org/Felipe Lopes*



After the extraordinary days of Lampedusa and Von Der Leyen - Meloni's propaganda walk on the island, the Italian government's response continues to be one-sided: the most significant point of the measures approved by the Council of Ministers on September 18th is the extension of the administrative detention of "irregular" people from six to eighteen months and the creation of a detention center in anticipation of deportation in each Italian region, in "remote areas" and with management directly entrusted to the army. **Real camps, places of permanent violation of fundamental rights, in Italy as in Libya.**

### **MASS DEPORTATIONS AND CONTINUOUS BORDER VIOLENCE IN TUNISIA**

From July 2023 onwards, a practice by the Tunisian authorities which already existed on a smaller scale, became systematized. In Sfax and other Tunisian towns, **hundreds of migrants were arrested in the street or in their homes before being deported to the Libyan and Algerian borders.** For more than a month, entire families were left in the middle of the desert, without access to food or water. There have been several reports of people dying as a result of these inhumane measures.

Still today, the fate of thousands of people remains uncertain. While some have managed to return to their places of residence, many say they have been forced to accept a so-called "voluntary" return to their countries of origin in exchange for humanitarian aid delivered by the Red Crescent. Some have been

kidnapped by Libyan militias and still others have had to flee to Algeria, where they risk a chain-refoulement to Niger.

Today, many migrants remain blocked at borders or in southern towns such as Zarzis or Medenine. In Sfax, the situation has become dramatic, with hundreds of people becoming homeless following their expulsion, while many others continue to arrive at the Algerian border and reach the city in the hope of crossing to Italy. For their part, the Tunisian coast guard continues to attack boats, regularly causing shipwrecks that cost the lives of those trying to flee the country at all costs. According to diverse reports, they also deport survivors to the desert directly after interception at sea.

*"Since July 2023, the Place Beb Jebli in the center of the city of Sfax has been the scene of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Around 500 people, including women and children, have gathered there after being evicted from their homes. They come from Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Chad, Eritrea and Niger, fleeing armed conflicts, civil wars and humanitarian crises.*

*These refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have been expelled from their homes, made homeless and some deported to the Algerian and Libyan borders by the authorities. Many of these people then managed to return to Sfax, where, deprived of everything, they live on the street, on the ground, in very precarious conditions".*

**Source:** Extracts from the press release "Humanitarian emergency in the Sfax governorate: civil society sounds the alarm in the face of an unsustainable situation" (translated from French), September 14, 2023



Migrants deported in Amra (Tunisia). Photo: Tweet from Jihed Brirmi, September, 24 2023

## STRENGTHENING BORDER EXTERNALISATION IN TUNISIA

Despite the border violence perpetrated by the Tunisian authorities against people on the move, on July 16, the EU and Tunisia signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) for a “strategic and comprehensive partnership aimed at combating irregular migration and boosting economic ties between the bloc and the North African country.” [€150 million](#) was announced to achieve this goal. The deal also provides for more Tunisians settled “illegally” in Europe to be

repatriated and for sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia to be sent back to their countries of origin.

This new agreement has provoked a reaction from civil society, which has strongly criticized the reinforcement of securitarian, racist, and inhumane policies.

**Despite this brutalization of the border regime, thousands of people continue their struggle to move freely and the MRCC will continue to stand by their side.**

*“[...] While Tunisia’s alignment with EU border externalisation policies has long been documented, we denounce what we view today as marking a dangerous turning point in the endorsement of these policies and of the racist assumptions that underpin them. Tunisian authorities have been increasingly displaying their determination to maintain and strengthen a system of exclusion and exploitation of nationals of sub-Saharan African countries. Instead of condemning this racist escalation, based on the populist and conspiracy-infused discourses characterising the country’s current authoritarian drift, European representatives are instrumentalizing so-called irregular migration by presenting it as a “shared plague”. The EU is therefore opportunistically and irresponsibly backing the President’s stances and fueling anti-migrant and anti-Black hatred, while claiming to be helping Tunisia protect its own borders, rather than those of Europe. [...]*

*This Memorandum will further amplify the asymmetries in the access to mobility and opportunities between the EU and Tunisia, notably by contributing to what is termed the “brain drain”, and to the economic models that fuel the causes of migration and the widening of inequalities. In return, the incentives proposed by the EU, such as visa facilitations for “skilled partnerships”, have already been promised to Tunisia without ever actually materialising. The externalisation of Europe’s borders thus affects all those deemed “undesirable” by the EU: both Tunisians and other nationals of the African continent [...].”*

**Source:** Extracts from the open letter “Against the anti-migrant and anti-Black policies of the EU and Tunisia” from 379 researchers and members of civil society from the Global South and the Global North



YOU FUCKED  
WITH THE  
WRONG  
CONTINENT

Demonstration in Tunis following the racist discourse of the President, February 2023.

Photo: Haïfa Mzalouat



# 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.

### JULY 2023

1 July

Through the night, **Humanity 1 (SOS Humanity)** rescues 201 people over the course of 5 rescue operations. The distant port of Ortona is assigned, requiring an unnecessary 3.5 additional days of journey.

3 July

**Geo Barents (Médecins sans Frontières)** in collaboration with civil aircraft **Colibri 2 (Pilotes Volontaires)** respond to a distress case in the Maltese SAR zone, rescuing 51 people from an unseaworthy wooden boat.

6 July

**Alarm Phone** receives a distress call and forwards it to authorities and NGOs. **Open Arms** finds the wooden boat that had gone adrift with 100 people who had left Libya 3 days prior (1).

7 July

**Ocean Viking (SOS Mediteranée)** first heads to 46 people in a fiberglass boat in distress spotted by **Seabird 2 (Sea-Watch)**, then to another rescue of 11 people who had previously called the **Alarm Phone** (2).

11 July

**Colibri 2** provides **Humanity 1** with aerial assistance during 4 rescues of 200 people who had left Tunisia (3). The vessel is assigned the distant port of Anacona, 1400km from the rescues.

12 July

**Aurora (Sea Watch)** responds to 2 distress cases, one with 80 people and another with 40, one of which had initially called the **Alarm Phone**. Both groups departing from Libya were brought to Lampedusa.

14 July

During the night, **Nadir (RESQSHIP)** rescued 91 people from two boats in danger of capsizing while on the way to the **Aurora**, which needed assistance with several unseaworthy vessels. Earlier that day, **Nadir** had already responded to a distress case, bringing aboard 100 people as instructed by the Italian authorities.

With the assistance of **Colibri 2**, **Aurora** spots 11 boats in distress. Over the course of many hours, **Aurora** helps to stabilize the situation by providing life vests and life rafts to 485 people, 52 of whom are taken aboard the **Aurora** which is then assigned the distant port of Trapani (4).

15 July

**Geo Barents** makes its way to 41 people on an unseaworthy rubber boat spotted by **Seabird**. 12 boats in distress are rescued by **Geo Barents** in coordination with **Colibri 2** and **Mare\*Go (Zusammenland)** (5). In total, 465 people are brought onboard, 116 of whom are disembarked in Lampedusa, with the remaining forced to wait for disembarkation in the distant port of Livorno.

18 July

**Nadir** in collaboration with **Colibri 2** assists 341 people in distress, 138 of whom are taken aboard. Everyone is able to safely disembark in Lampedusa (6).

20 July

**Alarm Phone** receives a distress call from a vessel and **Life Support (Emergency)** responds. On the way, 3 other boats in distress are found, totaling 184 people (7).

24 July

72 people in 2 boats are rescued by **Open Arms** following calls to the **Alarm Phone** and air reconnaissance by **Seabird 2**.

31 July

**Louise Michel** finds an iron boat with 43 people that departed from Sfax. The boat, initially spotted near another which had been rescued by the Italian Coast Guard, was left for more than 6 hours in worsening weather conditions causing it to begin filling with water.

1

 **Open Arms ENG**  
@openarms\_found

 **#BREAKINGNEWS**

The **#OpenArms** has just located a wooden boat adrift with 100 people on board, including 9 women and 15 unaccompanied minors. We know that some of them are from Eritrea, Sudan, Syria and Ethiopia and that they left Libya 3 days ago.


2

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

In yesterday's operation of our **#Aurora**, with the support of **@PVolontaires**, we were able to locate 11 boats with about 485 people. Our crew stabilized the situation for hours by handing out life jackets and deploying life rafts until Italian authorities rescued several boats.

3

 **SOS Humanity (international)**  
@soshumanity\_en

 Breaking: In 4 rescues from this afternoon, the crew of **#Humanity1** rescued around 200 people in total from distress at sea who had set off from **#Tunisia**. Among them are a heavily pregnant woman as well as several children & women. All of them are now being cared for on board.

4

 **MSF Sea**  
@MSF\_Sea

 **BREAKING**

A busy night at sea for our team! After the first rescue conducted yesterday at noon, we have successfully rescued 224 more people from 5 distressed boats within the Maltese search and rescue region. The five rescue operations were coordinated by the **#Italian #MRCC**.

5

 **RESQSHIP**  
@resqship\_int

(1/3) Non-stop operation: Yesterday, **#Nadir** found 8 boats in distress within 14h, with a total of 341 people on board. Our crew distributed life jackets and provided first aid. In cooperation with the IT Coast Guard and **@pilotesvolontaires**, the crew assisted several 100 refugees.

6

 **SOS MEDITERRANEE**  
@SOSMedIntl

Early morning, **#OceanViking** disembarked the 57 survivors rescued in 2 operations on July 7. After going through traumatic experiences in **#Libya** & at sea, we are glad that they reached land safely. Reminder: **@SOSMedIntl** & **@ifrc** are filling the gap left by EU States in saving lives

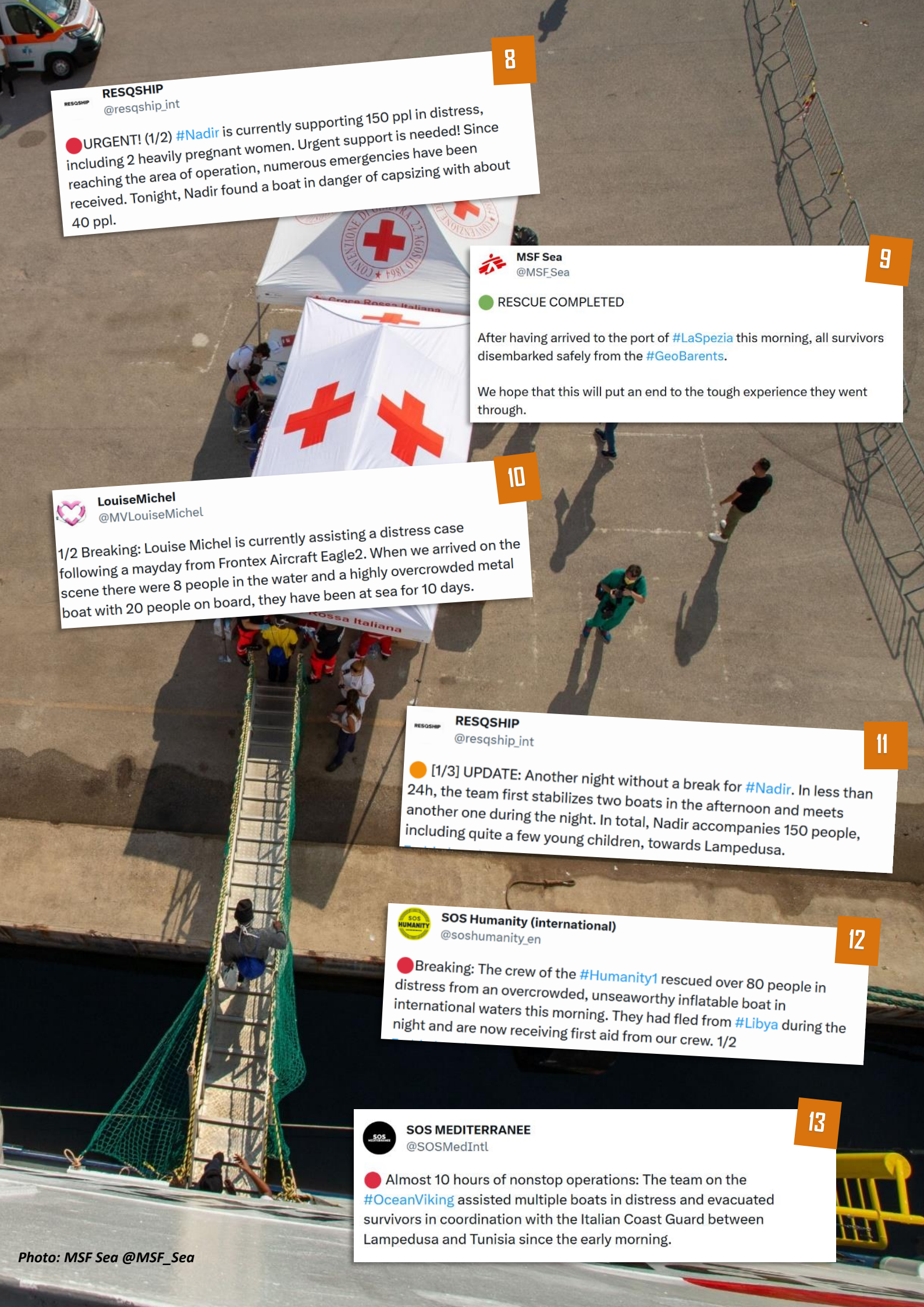
7

 **EMERGENCY NGO**  
@emergency\_ngo

**#LifeSupportSAR** has rescued 184 people in 4 rescues in international waters. Among them are 26 women (2 of whom are pregnant) and 56 children.  
13 rescued people have disembarked at Lampedusa to keep Life Support within capacity; the rest will disembark at the port of Taranto.

## AUGUST 2023

- 2 August** **Open Arms**, after rescuing 24 people, respond to an alert of 2 additional boats with 100 people. Upon arriving to the position, the so-called Libyan Coast Guard is on scene, having set fire to one boat and intimidates Open Arms. The fate of those 100 people remains unknown, while the 24 onboard Open Arms must wait for disembarkation in the distant port of Civitavecchia.
- 4 August** **Nadir** helps to stabilize 150 people from 4 different boats, taking aboard 110 and bringing them to Lampedusa (8).
- 7 August** **Seabird** provides air support to **Geo Barents**, who responds to an iron boat with 49 people, 3 of whom had fallen overboard. 2 are recovered from the water, while 1 remains missing (9). For the fourth time in 2023, the distant port of La Spezia is assigned for the survivors.
- 9 August** **Louise Michel** responds to a mayday relay: 8 people had fallen overboard from an overcrowded metal boat that had an additional 20 people. They had been at sea for 10 days. Everyone was brought aboard and given urgent food, water, and medical assistance (10).
- 10 August** Over the course of 24 hours, **Nadir** encounters 3 separate boats in distress, stabilizing each one and accompanying 150 people safely to Lampedusa (11).  
In one of its largest rescue operations, **Ocean Viking** completes 15 separate rescues of 623 people. The operations last 36 hours during which the crew operates nonstop.
- 11 August** Fishermen spot a boat in distress and the **Nadir** responds, coming across a second boat on the way. After Nadir's initial response, all 95 people are taken aboard with **Ocean Viking**.  
**Humanity 1** rescues an overcrowded inflatable raft with around 80 people. Later in the afternoon they take on an additional 20 people onboard from another overcrowded boat (12).
- 13 August** **Nadir** responds to 3 different boats with 100 people, reporting their distress to the authorities and giving assistance. The following day, Nadir responds to another boat in risk of capsizing, taking aboard all 19 people and bringing them safely to Lampedusa.
- 17 August** After an alert by **Seabird**, **Geo Barents** rescues 55 people. The so-called Libyan Coast Guard appears at the scene and begins threatening Geo Barents, trailing the ship for some time to intimidate those aboard the vessel.
- 18 August** **Aurora** takes 72 people aboard after having assisted **Open Arms** in an initial rescue operation. The distant port of Trapani is assigned, despite the vessel running low on fuel. When the Aurora reaches Trapani 3 days later, authorities place the ship in administrative detention for 20 days.
- 23 August** **Open Arms** is also placed under a 20-day administrative detention and fined 10,000 euros after responding to 3 different distress situations in collaboration with the Italian authorities. All 195 people are safely disembarked in Carrara, but Open Arms is unable to continue due the authorities use of the Meloni Decree on the vessel.  
**Humanity 1** responds to 57 people from an unseaworthy wooden boat in the Maltese SAR zone. The distant port of Livorno is assigned, requiring a journey of four additional days.  
After **Sea Eye 4** safely disembarks 114 people in Salerno, the ship is placed under administrative detention for 20 days and fined 3,333 euros. This is the third civilian rescue ship placed in detention within a 48-hour period.
- 24 August** **Geo Barents** responds to 2 overcrowded boats with 168 people in the Libyan SAR zone. On the way to Livorno, the **Humanity 1** finds a small rubber boat with 10 people, which is helps to stabilize until further help arrives.  
In coordination with Seabird, **Ocean Viking** continuously responds to several distress situations. 7 boats with 439 people are rescue (13). The distant port of Genoa is initially assigned, but due to bad weather conditions, Ocean Viking is able to disembark a first group in Vibo Valentia and the remaining 2 people in Naples. No reason for assigning two separate ports is given by the authorities.
- 26 August** With assistance by **Seabird**, **Louise Michel** rescues 2 rubber boats with 124 people. A Libyan patrol boat attempts to intervene, endangering the safe rescue of the first boat.



8

**RESQSHIP**  
@resqship\_int

● URGENT! (1/2) #Nadir is currently supporting 150 ppl in distress, including 2 heavily pregnant women. Urgent support is needed! Since reaching the area of operation, numerous emergencies have been received. Tonight, Nadir found a boat in danger of capsizing with about 40 ppl.

9

**MSF Sea**  
@MSF\_Sea

● RESCUE COMPLETED

After having arrived to the port of #LaSpezia this morning, all survivors disembarked safely from the #GeoBarents.

We hope that this will put an end to the tough experience they went through.

10

**LouiseMichel**  
@MVLouiseMichel

1/2 Breaking: Louise Michel is currently assisting a distress case following a mayday from Frontex Aircraft Eagle2. When we arrived on the scene there were 8 people in the water and a highly overcrowded metal boat with 20 people on board, they have been at sea for 10 days.

11

**RESQSHIP**  
@resqship\_int

● [1/3] UPDATE: Another night without a break for #Nadir. In less than 24h, the team first stabilizes two boats in the afternoon and meets another one during the night. In total, Nadir accompanies 150 people, including quite a few young children, towards Lampedusa.

12

**SOS Humanity (international)**  
@soshumanity\_en

● Breaking: The crew of the #Humanity1 rescued over 80 people in distress from an overcrowded, unseaworthy inflatable boat in international waters this morning. They had fled from #Libya during the night and are now receiving first aid from our crew. 1/2

13

**SOS MEDITERRANEE**  
@SOSMedIntl

● Almost 10 hours of nonstop operations: The team on the #OceanViking assisted multiple boats in distress and evacuated survivors in coordination with the Italian Coast Guard between Lampedusa and Tunisia since the early morning.

Photo: MSF Sea @MSF\_Sea

# FORCED TO DISAPPEAR

## INTRODUCTION

*This is an introduction article of a series of articles in the next issues of Echoes aiming to explain the different problems that are faced by families in the process of searching for their loved ones, the deficient current system for identification and burial in a dignified manner. For each issue of Echoes, an article will be written to further illustrate, with concrete cases, the political unwillingness to commit to this work of search and identification.*

For over 20 years, the Mediterranean Sea has been referred to as a huge graveyard. In 2021, a map named "Closing borders kills"<sup>(1)</sup> attempted to quantify and locate the documented number of people on the move who have died or disappeared at the EU's (externalized) borders numbering at least 50,873 persons between 1993 and 2020. The number of people dying and disappearing at sea continues to rise. Seeing where these cases are concentrated - on the Canary route, in the Alboran Sea, in the Aegean Sea, and in the central Mediterranean - is enough to explain the direct relationship between the border regime, the militarization of borders and this endless hecatomb.

While the causes and responsibilities of these deaths and disappearances are clearly identified, their consequences are also highly problematic, raising major political confrontations and legal disputes.

The degeneration of the situation, with an increase in the number of lifeless bodies recovered from the shore or at sea, and a rise in the number of missing persons, is having an impact that is beginning to have dramatic effects at several levels on both sides of the Mediterranean: body management systems (health infrastructures such as morgues and hospitals, cemeteries, ... ) are not organized and structured to deal with such a large number of victims in a dignified manner; investigation systems are not designed to identify the deceased or missing persons; identification operations are complex; and, consequently most bodies are buried under cover of darkness.

Moreover, while bodies found on land are the responsibility of local administrations (unless national authorities intervene), there is no defined legal framework for bodies at sea, either at national or international level: the willingness and ability to

recover bodies depends on the various players involved and remains discretionary today.

In recent years, the number of bodies left at sea has increased: in addition to dozens of boats disappearing without a trace, more and more bodies are being left in the water due to difficulties in recovery during rescue operations, the impossibility for some SAR operators to take victims on board, but mainly due to the indifference of authorities who prefer not to deal with them.

In the central Mediterranean between 2014 and 2018, hundreds of bodies were taken to Italian shores by military assets, coastguards or search and rescue NGOs. Since then, with the geopolitical evolution in the region, the establishment of the so-called Libyan MRCC, and the strengthening of Libyan and Tunisian borders control capacities, as well as the criminalization of NGOs activity at sea, the number of bodies landing in Italy has fallen sharply.

The situation has gradually changed and the majority of victims, since 2019, have been found on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and registered in a "body management system" that remains highly deficient and unstructured, or are simply left in the water and disappear forever. In this context of the normalization of death in migration, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the families of people who have disappeared or died at sea, whether they are nationals of North African countries or elsewhere, to obtain information about their loved ones and to engage in identification and repatriation procedures.

The International Committee of the Red Cross recently produced a report illustrating the operation of body recovery and management systems in Italy, Greece, and Spain (2022), highlighting a whole series of critical factors (both structural and cyclical) which make identification operations complex, burial practices often expeditious, and access to information very complex for families.

### IN BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH, SERIOUS FAILURES

On the northern side of the Mediterranean, we can see that state systems for managing the bodies of people who have died during migration have tried to

organize themselves to deal with both isolated (individual) cases and non-isolated events that often involve dozens or hundreds of people. Yet the results of the mobilization of the civil society, which began in Italy with the shipwrecks of October 2013, remain inadequate, due to structural shortcomings, the inability to activate a national emergency mechanism, and the lack of coordination with local players, the objective difficulty of body recovery and identification operations in a context of migration, the lack of coordination of investigation, victim search and identification mechanisms, and the difficulty of families to access these processes.

The claim to stop the deaths at sea and to identify the missing and deceased have not been followed by the real implementation of an effective system capable of offering guardianship to the victims' families. The management of the shipwrecks near Lampedusa in 2019 and 2020, the interminable disappearances on the way to the Canaries, and the most recent disasters at Cutro or Pylos bear witness to a "case-by-case" management without a coordinated and standardized vision of the problem, a lack of organization between the state actors involved but mostly the unwillingness of authorities to commit to this work of search and identification.

On the southern side, EuromedRights recently published a report that attempts to illustrate the activity of civil society players in North Africa in support of families searching for loved ones, or in identification operations, in countries where the search and management system is in a state of transition, often unstructured or incapable of managing a growing number of victims (Tunisia), or clearly opaque and in critical conditions (as in Libya). Bodies are increasingly being left at sea, disappearing, being found by fishermen or along the seashores, in a way that is totally dissociated and disconnected from the events that are nonetheless often cataloged by activists, international organizations, and national authorities alike.

The Tunisian Minister of the Interior, Kamel Feki, announced (2) that 901 bodies of migrants had been found on the Tunisian coast between January 1 and July 20, 2023 alone. This situation has brought forensic structures and local administrations to a near collapse, unable to cope with such numbers (especially in the region of Sfax), and unable to organize a coordinated management process, between identification, burial, or repatriation.

## MANY OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

One of the possible solutions, for the southern side of the Mediterranean as for the northern side would be to set up a coordinated search and identification system, to enshrine the obligation to identify victims in national, European, and international law, and to offer real and concrete support to the families of missing and deceased persons. But the aim of strengthening the forensic and identification system remains a "secondary" objective, not because of the absolute necessity of identifying all victims, ensuring dignified treatment and burial of bodies, and providing families with an answer as to the fate of their loved ones. It is secondary, because this system can only be set up - already with enormous difficulties - in the way it is conceived today, in the presence of bodies, in the face of the materiality of death. And bodies are increasingly missing.



The absence of bodies, which deflects the obsession of families in the face of impossible mourning, is becoming more and more a strategy - a strategy that can only be achieved through the presence of bodies. We don't know how "voluntary" - of "management by disappearance", if we consider, for example, that last January the Italian Right could rejoice that Italian Interior Minister Piantedosi's migration control strategy was working, because - to quote UNHCR figures - the number of deaths at sea in Italy was significantly down on the previous year. But not to

recover the bodies, not to make phantom shipwrecks count, not to listen to the desperate pleas of families in search of loved ones is a fallacious strategy, because the names of the missing exist, and the bodies are coming back, as witnessed in Tunisia.



Cemetery in Lampedusa. Photo: Alarm Phone

However, a complementary solution to the plans for a forensic system capable of better and ideally identifying all victims, and previous to this, would be to work systematically to ensure that as many bodies as possible are recovered from the sea during rescue operations, and as quickly as possible to facilitate identification operations. Alternatively, witnesses to these disappearances should be put in a position to provide reliable information, in complete safety, to

help determine the objectivity of the disappearance of a traveling companion or loved one who has taken to the sea.

Clearly, the real and only solution should be to prevent these deaths by enabling everyone to move around freely without having to put their own lives at risk. But we also need to confront this "endless disappearance" today. Without being able to count on the capacity and political will of national authorities in this direction, it is nevertheless possible, as actors in civil society, and in particular for those directly involved in operations at sea, to reflect collectively on this issue, in an attempt to find answers - however partial - both in terms of procedures, techniques and practices for recovering bodies or traces of bodies, testimonies, and elements enabling us to combat these disappearances.

The presence of a body should make it possible to identify it, and many associations, international organizations, researchers and activists are committed to ensuring that these operations are as efficient and transparent as possible, at the cost of calling on the competent authorities in a forceful manner and using legal procedures. This is a fundamental part of the work, and it is essential to give visibility to the activities of these civil actors, as well as to their awareness-raising and family information activities, to enable them to play a direct and active role in identification operations.

But in order to do this, the bodies must be recovered and treated appropriately, as quickly as possible and under the best conditions. And if, for pragmatic reasons, recovery proves impossible, technical devices and practices need to be developed so that the objectivity of a person's disappearance can be confirmed as accurately, or plausibly, as possible. It would then be a matter of assessing the capacities of each actor involved, and his or her availability to devote part of its activity - although the priority in maritime law remains rescue - to these activities of recovery or search for traces/evidence of disappearance.

(1) Nicolas Lambert, [Fermer les frontières tue](#), 26 February 2020

(2) Kapitalis, [Tunisie : 901 corps de migrants repêchés en mer depuis le début de l'année](#), 28 July 2023

# LEGAL FRAGMENT

## HUMAN RIGHTS AS A MISSING DISCOURSE

### The 10-point action plan to “stop sea arrivals”

By Chiara Denaro

During a visit to the island of Lampedusa, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced plans to address the surge in migrant arrivals.

The action plan by Von der Leyen was nothing new: a further attack on the right to leave and to seek asylum. “Preventing departures” and “stopping sea arrivals” were the main slogans. The ten-point action plan was also not a surprise but fully aligned with the already existing cornerstones of EU policies on border management, migration, and asylum.

Against a background of progressive undermining of the right to asylum, Von Der Leyen stressed the will of further involvement of EU agencies (EUAA and Frontex) in the identification procedures of migrants (point 1) – which includes the attribution of the initial juridical status of “asylum seekers” versus “people not in need of protection” – with the aim of quickly rejecting applications that are unfounded (point 7) and repatriating those who are not eligible for asylum to the countries of origin (point 3).

Being aware of the actual lack of repatriation agreements with most of them – Von der Leyen mentioned that Vice President Margaritis Schinas will engage in further negotiation efforts.

The dismantling of asylum guarantees has been in place for years through the strategic use of the “safe country of origin” criterion as an obstacle to accessing asylum. Those who come from SCOs are mostly prevented from seeking asylum and are almost automatically channelled through pathways of detention aimed at deportation. When they manage to overcome these obstacles, they face “accelerated procedures,” which further limit their access to adequate information and legal assistance – both before the commission hearing and in case of a negative decision. Amongst the most worrisome provisions introduced by Italian Law 50/2023, is the extension of time limits for detention for asylum seekers coming from countries that are strategically re-defined as “safe” (art. 6 bis, art. 7), which - in order to become real - is leading to the multiplication of detention spaces, whose juridical status remains unclear.

For those who manage to overcome all these obstacles, by conquering the right to remain, the commissioner urged the other MSs to accept transfers of migrants from Italy, through the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (point 2). In the meantime, EU countries such as Germany and France declared their unavailability to receive migrants,

Photo: von der Leyen and Meloni meeting in Lampedusa, September 17, 2023. Photo: Fellipe Lopes





making this statement no more than empty words. The same feeling was raised by Von der Leyen's remarks on legal pathways and humanitarian corridors, to be increased as an anti-smuggling instrument (point 8).

Another key point of the speech was – as usual – the struggle against “smugglers and traffickers.” On this point, the commissioner mentioned the will to update the legal framework – namely the already critical “facilitation directive” (point 4) and the need to act against the “logistics of the smugglers,” by destroying recuperated boats and dinghies (point 6). This last remark sounded particularly hypocritical, as the majority of them are already extremely unseaworthy before the departure, and just get destroyed during the crossings.

Finally, about border management and externalization policies, she mentioned the intention of strengthening maritime and aerial surveillance (point 4), also through the supply of additional equipment to the Tunisian Coast Guard (point 5) in the frame of the implementation of the MoU, the contracting of new projects and the disbursement of funds to Tunisia (point 10). Just the day after the speech, the Memorandum was judged irregular by the Council of the European Union, as signed “without respecting the procedures.” In particular the EU Council's authorization was missing, namely the agreement of all the other EU member states. Of course, the political situation in Tunisia, the lack of basic guarantees and freedom of the rule of law, as well as the systematic life-threatening violence

against black people, which is more and more often followed by deportation to desert buffer zones which already caused several deaths, were missing discourses. Any EU responsibility in these human rights violations was washed up by UNHCR and IOM presence there, “to ensure the protection of migrants along the route” and “to increase assisted voluntary returns” (point 9).

Despite being presented as a press conference, the Meloni and Von der Leyen speeches left almost no space for questions by journalists. Only two questions were allowed to be posed, and neither raised any human rights concerns. Systematic border violence and human rights violations were missing. Search and rescue operations also remained unmentioned, as well as the duty to disembark rescued people in countries where they cannot be exposed to human rights violations, such as Libya and Tunisia.

“We will decide who comes to the European Union and under what circumstances, and not the smugglers and traffickers,” Von der Leyen said in Lampedusa. Beyond sounding a colonial and racist statement, this is just unrealistic.

**People will continue to courageously challenge and overcome violent and deadly borders every day. People will keep struggling to exercise their right to leave and to choose where to leave, asking for dignity and freedom.**

**And we will keep standing by their side!**

*Demonstration in Lampedusa, September 2023,  
Photo: Maldusa*



# INTERVIEW

## WITH ACTIVISTS FROM THE ALARM PHONE NETWORK



### ALARM PHONE

**"We can only be creative as a broad network of solidarity that relies on information from people on the move and their relatives."**

*Since October 2014, the WatchTheMed Alarm Phone (AP) has been operative 24/7 as a hotline that supports people in distress at sea. The AP activist network with around 300 members in many cities in Europe and North Africa, all of whom are volunteers, is mainly active on four migration routes: in the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece, in the Western Mediterranean between Morocco and Spain (including the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands), in the Channel between France and the UK, and in the Central Mediterranean between Libya, Tunisia, Malta and Italy. During the last nine years, AP has accompanied and supported about 7.000 boats along these different routes. In 2022 and 2023, the highest number of calls came from the Central Mediterranean region. The following interview will focus on experiences and challenges in this region, five activists from AP contributed to the answers.*

***Can you briefly describe how your AP shift work looks like in the Central Mediterranean, especially now in summer 2023 when so many boats are departing from Tunisia and Libya?***

Over the last years, the Central Mediterranean has once again become an incredibly busy route, with the number of people arriving in Italy increasing year after year since 2019. We have directly felt such an increase in our shifts. During good weather periods, we can be alerted to dozens of boats in distress per day and this is certainly an extremely challenging situation.

When boats call us after departing from Libya, we are often able to maintain contact as they have one satellite phone on board. In this way, we can receive key information from the boat, especially their GPS position, which we can then relay to state authorities and the civil fleet.

The situation is very different when it comes to boat departures from Tunisia. Here, the people do not have satellite phones and as the mobile phone coverage is only limited to places close to shore, we are often unable to reach the travelers for lengthy periods of time. We often try to match boats after they have arrived in Lampedusa but this is a difficult task, given that there were days during which over 40 boats landed on the island. We speak with many survivors after they reached Lampedusa safely. At the same time, we often find out only later that some boats have capsized and people have drowned. Many boats leaving Tunisia are incredibly dangerous metal boats that can sink within minutes.

***Alarm Phone is an actor with a very decentralized structure with many shift teams working in different cities and countries. Can you describe your structure and concept in a few sentences?***

The AP is an activist network that has local teams in a variety of places, both in Europe and Africa, and which thus had to create an infrastructure that allows us to work in a transversal and decentralized way. We often get media requests wondering about where our "headquarter" is and people are surprised when they find out how we work. Maintaining a hotline day and night requires a flexible system. Calls from the sea are rerouted to our members who are "on shift." Small "shift teams" of at least two people speaking English and French are constantly available to respond to distress calls. We all follow our common alarm plans, which we drafted collectively as written standard procedures and which have been adapted and extended time and again, according to the developments and changes in the respective rescue zones.

We also have many members who are not doing phone shifts but who carry out incredibly central tasks, such as distributing the number to migrant communities in Morocco and informing them about the dangers of sea crossings.

We also have innumerable working groups that are needed to carry out our work, ranging from technical support, translation, regional experts and research, media and documentation, cooperation with other actors, the search for missing people, and so on.

**What are the differences in your work with boats coming from Tunisia and from Libya?**

As mentioned above, the boats from Tunisia usually do not have satellite phones to communicate when at sea and thus we depend very much on information relayed to us by relatives and friends on land. The conditions for people on the move in Sfax or Zarzis are quickly changing and have deteriorated due to awful political developments over recent months. We saw all the raids and pogroms against Black people following the racist speech by Tunisia's president Kais Saied in February 2023.

People on the move are being deported into desert regions and brutal border controls escalated further after the Tunisian deal with the EU and Italy in July. As AP, we have members and good friends in Tunisia, who continuously document the situation, who try to scandalize the racist assaults, and who build practical solidarity structures in support of people forced into hiding as well as of the public protesters in front of the UNHCR and IOM offices.

From Libya, we have far fewer sources informing us from the ground but there are people who contact us after they have experienced interceptions and push backs. We also support Refugees in Libya, a self-organized refugee movement that carried out unprecedented sit-in-protests in Tripoli in 2021/22. Some members made it to Europe later and continue now to amplify the voices and demands of people on the move who are still imprisoned by Libyan militias or left abandoned in the streets by the UNHCR.

**In October 2023, AP will turn nine years old. Can you highlight some main developments in your work in the Central Mediterranean over this time?**

The idea for our hotline project emerged in response to the shipwreck from the 11th of October 2013, when Italian and Maltese Coastguards ignored the SOS calls from a boat and let 266 people die. We were inspired by Father Mussie Zerai, an Italian priest with an Eritrean background, whose private phone had turned into a hotline for refugees from East Africa – many years before we thought about AP. Over the first years of AP work in the Central Med, we only could build contacts to the boats by Father Zerai. He received many calls from boats in distress and would then forward these cases to the Italian Coastguards and to us. We would then take over the assistance of these boats and try to mobilize for their rescue.

After the Italian-Libyan Memorandum of Understanding - implemented by the social democratic minister Minniti in 2017 - a new pull- and push back regime came into effect. Salvini became Italy's interior minister in 2018, further trying to prevent sea crossings. Around that time, with the AP number spreading in Libya and elsewhere, more and more people on the move would contact us directly. At the latest since 2019, AP found itself increasingly in the role of a "rescue coordination center," receiving many calls from boats and relatives on land, trying to push EU authorities to carry out rescue operations, and coordinating with the civil fleet to guarantee that people were not left to die.

Photo: Alarm Phone



***Being on duty 24/7 and responding to complex and ever-increasing distress situations sounds like a very stressful task. How do you manage this within your activist network?***

Our work is indeed challenging and only possible to stem because we are so many in the network, some of us still active since we started the project in 2014. Our activism depends on knowledge and skill sharing and on the sharing of responsibilities horizontally among us. We need many shoulders to carry our work collectively. Regular face-to-face meetings twice-a-year are also key for us. We meet on both sides of the Mediterranean so that as many of us as possible can meet despite the harsh European visa regime. We need these meetings to exchange, discuss and learn about the developing situation in the Mediterranean.

Over the last years, we also focused more on issues of exhaustion, trauma, and self-care. It is amazing to see what support structures we were able to build over the years and that we were able to grow with the challenges we faced. But we can only be creative as a broad network of solidarity that relies on information from people on the move and their relatives, who are based around the globe.

***To be in direct contact with people in desperate situations at sea and to know that some of them later drowned must be a heavy burden. How do you deal with such experiences?***

When European coastguards fail to react to boats in distress and the ships of the civil ships are not in the area, it is particularly difficult to assist people at risk of drowning. While trying to pressurize authorities to rescue, we remain in regular contact with the people on board to provide psychological support and offer hope. This often helps them to not feel alone and abandoned and we try to empower them in such traumatic situations.

Certainly, we are confronted with death at sea nearly every day. Relatives and survivors often contact us to report shipwrecks and people going missing. And sometimes we are the last ones who hear the desperate voices before contact is lost and they disappear into the sea. Of course, AP members cope with such situations in different ways. Sometimes, affected persons take a break from shifts or even leave the network after traumatic experiences. We try to work as local and transnational teams so that nobody is left alone with such experience or the haunting question whether we as AP could have done more or something different to avoid such an outcome.

We also try to reflect and mourn collectively, for example by meeting online after shipwrecks occurred or lighting candles to remember the missing and dead. We also regularly hold commemorations, in which we grieve and protest the EU border regime for causing mass death at sea. Together with relatives and survivors, we engage in organizing CommemorActions and at times also take legal steps against state actors for their acts of non-assistance and left-to-die policies.

***You mentioned the coordinating role of AP: how do you evaluate the collaboration process within the civil fleet during the last years? What is working well, what is still missing from your perspective?***

As the official rescue coordination centers (RCC) of Italy and Malta have intensified their collaboration with Libyan militias and Tunisian authorities in order to prevent arrivals to Europe, civil actors are basically left alone with carrying out rescues, especially off the Libyan coasts. From our point of view, the collaboration between the many bigger and smaller NGOs with at times diverse political backgrounds and experiences has developed very well over the last years. The level of communication and coordination between the actors working at sea, in the skies, and on the phone is effective and often successful, even in our race against the push- and pull-back regime. Over the last months, we have noticed that more attention is being paid to the situation on land after boats arrive, thus showing a growing awareness of the often-difficult situations people face after reaching Europe and the importance of providing information about criminalization and asylum procedures in Italy.

The ships of the civil fleet are usually operational several days per rotation and often only for a few times per year. Additionally, some of them are blocked through Italy's administrative measures and obstructed by the far port policy and the obligation to turn to port immediately after a rescue operation. The air assets (Seabird of Sea-Watch and Colibri of Pilotes Volontaires) are operational more regularly, but sometimes in maintenance. As AP is the only actor who is present in the Mediterranean all year long, we need to turn to merchant vessels and hope for their assistance when the civil fleet is absent. But merchant vessels are not reliable actors. Whether they respond to distress situations and bring the rescued to Europe or force them to Libya through "push backs by proxy" depends on captains and companies.

***On an operational level, where do you see the biggest challenges at the moment for people on the move and subsequently for you as an emergency hotline?***

The push- and pull-back regime, which was established between EU member states, Libya and Tunisia, remains the main challenge in the Central Mediterranean. The use of Frontex airplanes and drones is key in this regime, trying to quickly orchestrate the interception of boats that were spotted from the sky. Also for us as AP it is very difficult to estimate the true extent of “successful” push backs nowadays. In the SAR 3 region, the eastern region between Benghazi and Tobruk, we also face a new actor for several months now, a militia called Tareq Bin Zayed Brigade. They operate with a big and fast asset, probably closely-coordinated with Italian and Maltese authorities to organize interceptions even from far inside the Maltese SAR zone.

Also in view of the new EU-Tunisia deal we fear a further militarization and brutalization of Tunisian forces, aiming to stop the boats leaving from Sfax and other Tunisian cities. Combined with the criminalization of migration itself, particularly directed against boat drivers, the deterrence policies are worsening and directly responsible that the central Mediterranean passage remains one of the world’s deadliest migration routes.

***In light of these developments, what do you fear, but also hope for, for the rest of this year and for 2024?***

EU member states continue to negotiate agreements and deals with Tunisia and Libya to fight migration and we see the consequences very clearly: violent mass expulsions along the land-borders, including in the Sahara where there are almost no witnesses, brutal interceptions at sea, and so many deaths and disappearances. The rise of such border brutality is

what we see already and fear that it will escalate further. The EU’s support of authoritarian regimes and dictators has a long history and tradition be it in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt or elsewhere – and there are no signs that this will change anytime soon. Europe’s borders become further externalized, forcing people on the move onto even deadlier routes. Also the situation within Europe is worsening, with deportations increasing and the asylum system becoming ever-more restrictive.

To take a more hopeful, or “possibilistic” perspective: With more than 125.000 people arriving in Italy (until September 2023) via the Central Mediterranean, we might see a new record number of arrivals this year. That is remarkable as it occurs despite Italy’s “post-fascist” government and the brutalization of EU deterrence policies.

Who could have imagined such an increase in arrivals in 2019, when only 11,471 people succeeded in crossing the sea to Italy? And who would have expected in summer 2022 that one year later, crossings from Tunisia would increase dramatically and “overrun” the hotspot system in Lampedusa? Who would have thought that in August 2023, some people would make it from Sfax to Marseille in five days?

Thousands continue to die and suffer, yes. That is the horrible reality, an unbearable crime, the consequence of a cruel deterrence strategy. But that migration stubbornly continues is also a reality. Once more, the autonomy of migration proves more creative and stronger than the EU border regime.

***We do not know the future, but we will continue to follow the tenacity of the struggles for freedom of movement and stand in solidarity with people on the move, day by day, along the different maritime routes!***



# AMPLIFYING VOICES

## FROM THE BOAT TO THE PLANE: A JOURNEY OF INJUSTICE

By Alarm Phone Tunis and Alarm Phone Palermo

With 2,308 Tunisian nationals deported from Italy in 2022 (1,872 in 2021), representing 59% of the total number of deportees, followed by Albania and Egypt, with 518 and 329 people respectively, Tunisians arriving in Italy are confronted with a violation of their most basic right, international protection.

In 2011, a bilateral agreement was signed between Tunisia and Italy designed to carry out mass expulsions of Tunisian nationals arriving by boat on Italian shores. Like the majority of agreements signed between Tunisia and the European Union and its member states, this agreement gives unequal and inequitable access to the right of freedom of movement. Another agreement was signed in 2020, which would allow Italy to expel almost twice the number of Tunisians, i.e. 80 people a week.

After the coup d'état of July 25, 2021, the political situation in Tunisia is increasingly dangerous and worsening by the day. Arrests and ongoing repression of political opponents, activists, trade unionists and journalists, ever-intensifying police violence and the criminalization of the LGBTQ++ community facing systematic and daily violence makes Tunisia an unsafe country of origin.

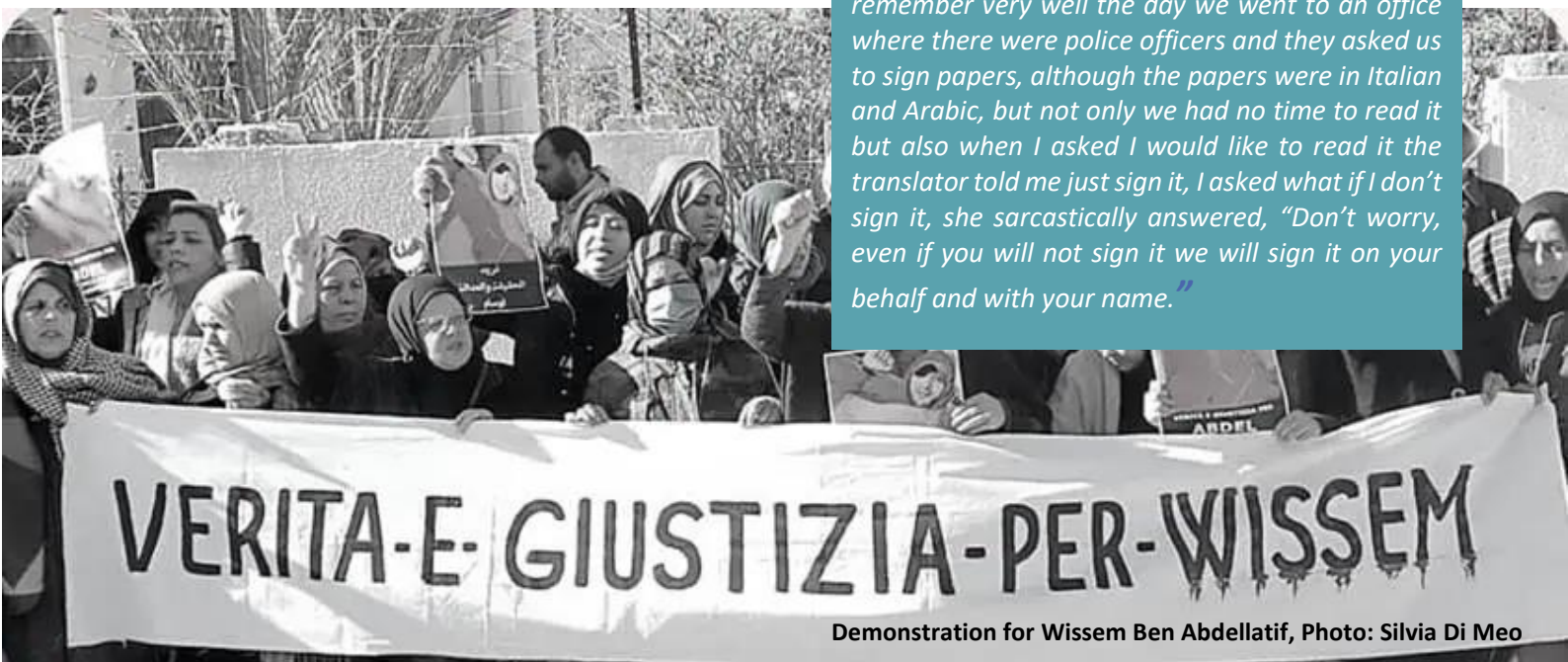
Tunisian nationals arriving by boat to Italy are all stigmatized and as soon as they arrive, they are sorted in big groups solely based on their nationality without any assessment of their individual case

throughout their “stay” in Italy. They receive no or partial information about their rights in Italy, as well as the reason for their detention and the outcome of their case. Tunisian migrants do not benefit from an appropriate and neutral translation, knowing that most of them do not speak Italian and that the only people they can speak with are translators.

Marwan\* a young Tunisian man who was recently deported from Italy after spending one and a half months in the Trapani Detention Center, emphasized the fact that during the time he spent in the CPR of Trapani and Center of Pantelleria he never received any valuable information.

*“ At first when I arrived in Pantelleria, it was my first time after several attempts, the only thing the translator at the port asked me about was the trip organizer and how we reached Italy. During the 8 days of my stay in the Pantelleria Center, I have seen the translator only once he brought me a phone to call my family and informed me that as a Tunisian I can't ask for asylum and therefore it is unnecessary that I even ask about it because they will anyways not care about what I ask for. No one ever told me about my rights although the center was not crowded and we were only 75 people there.*

*In Trapani as well, I have met several translators, not only they told me on several occasions that as a Tunisian I do not have the right to seek international protection but also whenever I ask them about the reason of our detention, when will we go out of detention and if we will be deported or not they do not give us any information. I remember very well the day we went to an office where there were police officers and they asked us to sign papers, although the papers were in Italian and Arabic, but not only we had no time to read it but also when I asked I would like to read it the translator told me just sign it, I asked what if I don't sign it, she sarcastically answered, “Don't worry, even if you will not sign it we will sign it on your behalf and with your name.”*



Demonstration for Wissem Ben Abdellatif, Photo: Silvia Di Meo

Concerning the conditions inside the center and the treatment they face by officers working there, Marwan said that when he first entered Trapani center he felt like he was entering a prison.

*“ Since they did not inform me where I was heading to I thought I was going to a prison, from the outside there were 3-4 meters long walls, inside it was all cages and people were detained inside these cages. On the first day of my arrival from Pantelleria, at around 11 pm, and after being awake since 6 am to leave from Pantelleria, they put me in a room with 30 people, gave me a mattress and told me to just wait. On the same day and after forcibly giving my fingerprints at around midnight, took everything I had on me and took me to a small room with 4 other people. The room only had a small window and a toilet. We were stuck in that room without going out or almost seeing any light. Even for the phone when I ask to make a call to my family or the lawyer, whether they refuse or they tell me we will take you and then never do it and keep me waiting. On the rare occasion where I can go out for a while and make a phone call, I am escorted with 8 cops. The food was disgusting and you always see people trying to commit suicide almost on a daily basis, the situation created more problems between the migrants themselves and there were always tensions and fights. ”*

According to a study conducted by ASGI, FTDES and ASF, in 2021 88.2% were victims of abuse within the CPR, and in the majority of cases (82.3%), this abuse was caused by CPR staff. People in the repatriation centers and mainly Tunisians face verbal and physical abuse in case they don't want to sign papers or give their fingerprints.

Such was the case of Wissem Ben Abdellatif, one of the few documented cases, who lost his life in Rome's San Camillo hospital after being transferred from the Repatriation Center of Rome. His death from a heart attack may have been caused by the use of restraint measures during his hospitalization. The same study showed that 32% of the people interviewed said they had been denied access to a doctor.

Marwan remembers once how a man fainted and was shaking on the floor in front of the police and that it took them 15 minutes to react to see if he was really fainting or pretending, just to leave the center.

Although Marwan had a different experience as he did not need a medical transfer, he nevertheless said that on a daily basis, the doctor of the CPR gave them anti-anxiolytic and anti-stress pills without a prescription or a proper medical check.

*“ He was giving me up to 4 pills a day, and not only me but everyone else in the CPR, even minors. The pills drain you from any energy you have, you have bad trips and give you nightmares. I had no other choice than to take them, imagine being detained in a small room, without seeing the sun for more than a month, without knowing what will happen to you and without knowing when you will be released, all you want is that the time passes quickly and that was the only option we had. These pills they were also a “solution” for them, they keep everyone calm and therefore nobody protests against this unjust detention ”*

Marwan perceived the journey and the deportation as a violence and an unjust act that he still cannot process and understand.

*“ I only was informed that I was getting deported few days before my actual day of deportation, I was handcuffed and taken to the airport of Trapani, where I met the consular of Tunisia who only asked me where I am from, I said the name of my city, then she ordered to take me to the airplane. We were around 40 and each of us was escorted by two police officers and handcuffed all along the flight. I still do not understand what happened to me and why, I wonder why do I have to go through all of this, I have tried several times before through different routes, I was intercepted at sea by the Tunisian Coast Guards, I was deported from Serbia and and I applied for different Schengen visas without any success. Now I know I cannot enter Schengen area for three years, but I will try again until I make it one day. ”*

These repatriation centers – in which those detained face violence is a daily experience, have no access to basic rights as migrants who have recently arrived in Italy, and go through opaque procedures while often given wrong information given by translators – can only result in severe psychological distress. Those, such as Tunisians, fleeing unstable social, economic and political situations and unsafety, face circumstances in which their right to international protection is not even guaranteed once in Italy.

# CRIMINALISATION

## URGENT WARNING: INCREASED DEATHS AT SEA, NGO VESSELS DETAINED

**Joint statement of the civil fleet signed by 56 organizations and published on August 28, 2023**

Up to 600 people lost their lives in another avoidable shipwreck off the Greek coast in June 2023. As civil society, we are horrified by the preventable deaths in the Central Mediterranean sea which happen year in, year out. Search and rescue ships are urgently needed to prevent further loss of life on the deadliest migration route in the world, yet EU member states – most prominently Italy – are actively obstructing civilian search and rescue efforts.

As of today, Aurora, Open Arms and Sea-Eye 4, three civilian ships fully equipped for search and rescue (SAR), are kept from operating at sea. The three detention orders, issued by Italian authorities in less than 48 hours, add to the significant caseload of administrative obstruction faced by SAR NGOs this year. Since the beginning of 2023, there have been eight cases of detentions of NGO vessels in Italy. The civilian search and rescue vessels Aurora, Geo Barents, Louise Michel, Mare\*Go, Open Arms and Sea-Eye 4, were each prevented from going to sea for 20 days, based on illegitimate regulations. Both Aurora and Sea-Eye 4 are detained for the second time this year. These detentions have kept SAR NGOs vessels away for a total of 160 days that could have been used to rescue people from boats in distress and to prevent the shipwrecks that occur on a daily basis in the Central Mediterranean.

The administrative harassment of NGO vessels is based on a recent law (1) passed by Italy which increased requirements for carrying out search and rescue activities and introduced sanctions in case of non-compliance. The new measures are part of a long history in Italy of criminalising and obstructing civilian search and rescue activities. Under the new law, Italian authorities can order civilian search and rescue ships to head to an assigned port immediately after a rescue – even in situations where there are other boats in distress in the vicinity of the NGO vessel. Italy's new law puts pressure on captains of the civil fleet to disobey international maritime law and the duty to rescue people in danger at sea. By obstructing rescue operations, Italian authorities are acting in

contravention of the international legal obligation to carry out rescues at sea.

The new legislation is compounded by the Italian government's 'distant ports' practice, which requires NGO ships to disembark rescued people in ports up to 1,600 km and five days' navigation away from the site of a rescue. International maritime law states that the disembarkation in a place of safety of persons rescued from distress at sea should take place "as soon as reasonably practicable," with "minimum deviation from the ship's voyage," and the time that survivors spend on board should be minimised (2). Yet in more than 60 instances since December 2022, Italian authorities have assigned an unnecessarily distant port for NGO vessels to disembark survivors. Moreover, in recent instances, Italian authorities have repeatedly instructed NGO ships to request a Place of Safety in Tunisia for people rescued at sea. With a severe lack of protection for asylum seekers, Tunisia is currently experiencing a surge of violence against migrant populations, meaning that the country cannot be considered a Place of Safety. Disembarking rescued people on its shores would be a violation of international law.

NGOs which have not complied with the illegitimate demands of the Italian authorities have been fined up to €10,000 and their vessels have been detained for 20 days. All NGOs carrying out search and rescue activities at sea now face the risk of further fines and detentions. According to Italian law, repeated non-compliance will lead to vessels being seized, which would result in a permanent end to the ship's operations.

The detention and possible seizure of NGO vessels, as well as the 'distant ports' practice, obstructs the lifesaving activities of search and rescue vessels. From recent experience – for example the restrictions placed on search and rescue NGOs by the Greek government in September 2021 – it is clear that the creeping obstructions we are experiencing in Italy will lead to fewer civilian rescue ships operating and to further loss of life in the Central Mediterranean.

As non-governmental organisations, associations and initiatives that advocate for the right of people on the move to protection and respect for their fundamental rights, we have witnessed the EU's closed-door and deterrence policies with rising concern. These policies do not result in fewer people trying to cross the Central Mediterranean, but result in more suffering



and more deaths. In the months since Italy – backed by the silent majority of EU member states – put these restrictive measures in place, the number of shipwrecks resulting in loss of life has increased dramatically; 2023 is already one of the most deadly of recent years. The rising frequency of shipwrecks makes the urgent need for additional search and rescue capacity even more obvious.

We send an urgent warning to the EU and its member states: if humanitarian assistance at sea continues to be obstructed, we are likely to see a drastically decreased – or even non-existent – presence of civilian search and rescue vessels in the Central Mediterranean by the end of the year. The result will be yet more lives lost, as the blocking of civilian rescue efforts will not stop people from attempting to cross the sea. We call on the EU and its member states to act urgently to stop the illegitimate obstruction of civilian search and rescue vessels by Italy. All civilian search and rescue ships must be released immediately and any fines resulting from Italy's new law must be dropped. Italy's law

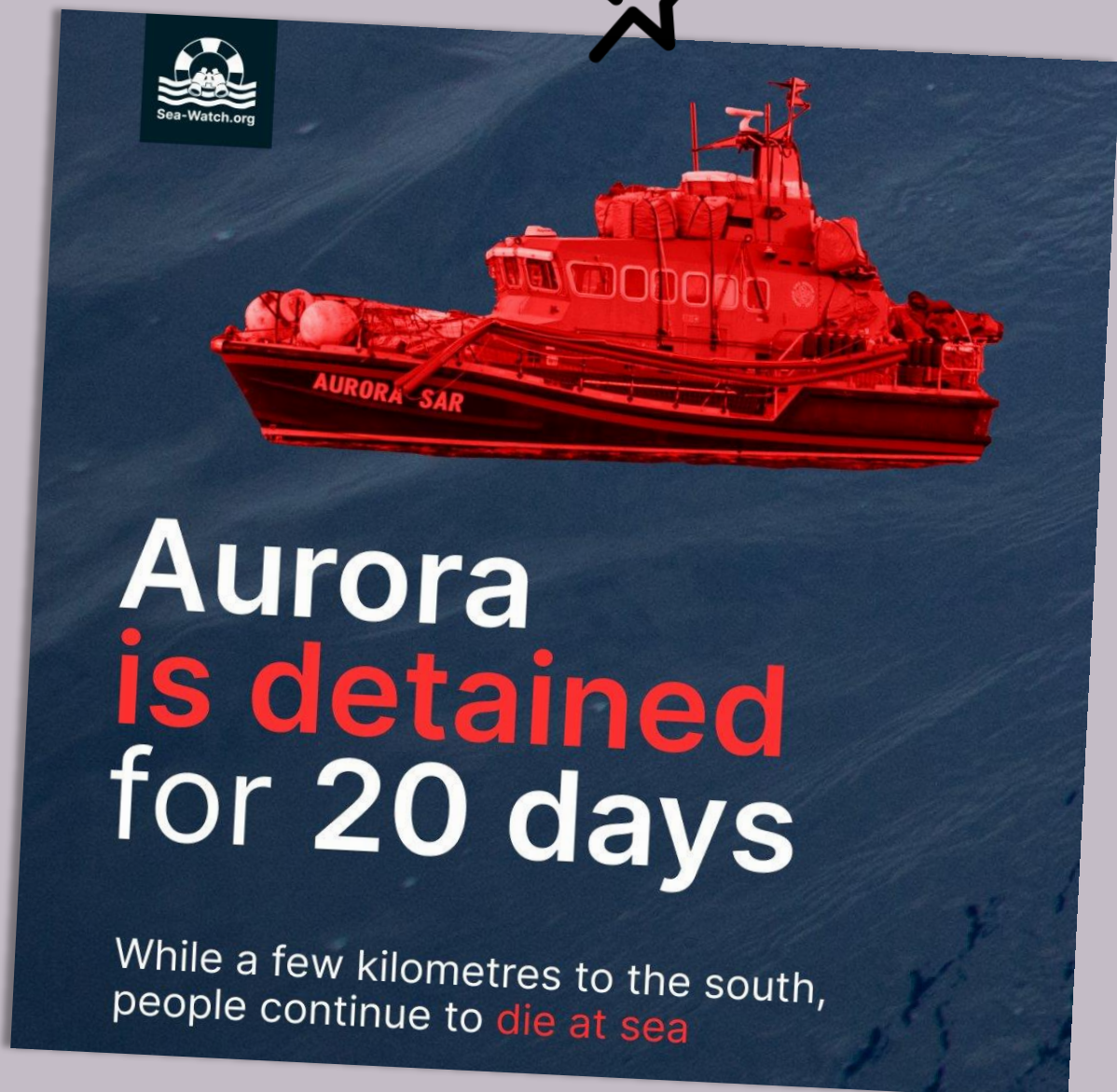
restricting NGO search and rescue activities in the Central Mediterranean must be revoked immediately; instead, international maritime law and human rights law must be the framework for all those who operate at sea. The EU Commission must put an end to the derogatory practices of its member states to basic principles of international law at the EU's external borders. Finally, EU states must create legal and safe corridors to prevent people from being forced onto unseaworthy boats in search of safety.

(1) Decree Law No. 1/2023, amended by Law No. 15 of 24 February 2023

(2) 2004 Amendments to the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (1979), IMO Resolution MSC.155(78), 3.1.9; IMO Resolution MSC.167(78), 2004, 6.8

### List of signatories

<https://sea-watch.org/en/urgent-warning-more-deaths-at-sea-ngo-ships-are-blocked/>



**Aurora**  
**is detained**  
**for 20 days**

While a few kilometres to the south,  
people continue to **die at sea**

# THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT'S THREAT AGAINST THE MARE JONIO

PRESS RELEASE BY MEDITERRANEA SAVING HUMANS PUBLISHED ON THE 11TH OF SEPTEMBER 2023



In the last few hours, the Italian government's willingness to hinder and block civil rescue ships has taken another negative leap forward: the authorities have ordered the shipping company of our MARE JONIO to "remove from the ship, before her departure, any equipment and supplies on board for the performance of rescue service". Failure to comply with this order would constitute a breach of Article 650 of the Penal Code, which carries a penalty of up to three months' imprisonment and a fine.

The order and the intimidation came at the end of the inspection visit carried out by the Italian Maritime Authorities on board the MARE JONIO, the only asset of the civil rescue fleet flying the Italian flag.

After a long, thorough, and severe inspection, which in fact began on the 22nd of August and ended on the 6th of September, all the documents allowing the MARE JONIO to sail were renewed, but its "rescue ship" certification was once again refused.

The "bureaucratic" pretexts are well known: despite the fact that the ship is recognised as well equipped for search and rescue (SAR) activities and has been certified for this purpose by the Italian Naval Register (RINA), it does not meet the criteria of two Circulars issued by the Authorities in December 2021 and February 2022, which require certain technical characteristics of the hull in accordance with the international SPS Code issued in May 2008. An absurd demand in itself, made worse by the fact that the Italian government wants to make this the standard for all European flags, thus hampering the entire Civil Fleet.

Over the last few years we thought we had seen it all in the Italian governments' senseless war against civil sea rescue: codes of conduct and closed ports, instrumental controls and technical detentions, investigations for aiding and abetting illegal immigration and million-euro fines, most recently selective landings, distant ports and unjustified administrative detentions.

But today's absurd order to the MARE JONIO to disembark rescue equipment is a further step taken in the direction of inhumanity: what sense does it make to order a ship that is preparing to sail the most dangerous and deadly stretch of sea on the planet - where more than 2,300 people have lost their lives since the beginning of the year - to deprive herself of life jackets, inflatable boats, medicines and medical equipment and whatever else is needed to save lives in danger?

**This order is simply outrageous and unacceptable to us, as is the threat of criminal consequences for our shipowners.**

**Together with many others, we reject it and will immediately challenge it at every level.**



# MOBILISATIONS

## 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF OCTOBER 2013 SHIPWRECKS

### LAMPEDUSA, 10 YEARS AFTER THE OCTOBER 3, 2013 MASSACRE

*By Agenzia Habeshia*

Ten years ago, the Lampedusa tragedy: 368 young lives cut short a few hundred meters from the beach, when freedom and a better future seemed just a step away.

The 10th anniversary of this tragedy comes in the very climate and practice that erects yet another barrier of death in the faces of thousands of other refugees and migrants, like those boys swept away in that gray dawn of October 3, 2013. We do not know whether members of this government and this majority, or, more generally, whether other key players in the politics of recent years, intend to promote or even participate in ceremonies and events in memory of what happened. But if it is true, as it is, that the best way to honor the dead is to save the living and respect their freedom and dignity, then it will not make sense to share the moments of recollection and reflection, which the date of October 3 calls for, with those who have been building walls and destroying bridges for years, ignoring the cry for help that is rising from all over the South. If they, too, want to "remember Lampedusa," let them do it alone. Let them stand alone. For in these ten years they have overthrown, destroyed, or distorted that great afflatus of solidarity and human pity aroused by the massacre in the consciences of millions of people around the world.

What, in fact, remains of the "spirit" and commitments of that time? Nothing. It has regressed to a cynicism and indifference even worse than the climate before that terrible October 3. And, even, in spite of the investigations made by the judiciary, it has still not been possible to understand how it was possible that 368 people met their deaths just 800 meters from Lampedusa, less than two kilometers from a port crammed with fast and well-equipped military units capable of arriving on the scene within minutes.

The magnitude of the tragedy drew attention, with the enormous force of 368 lives lost, to two points in particular: the humanitarian catastrophe of millions

of refugees seeking salvation across the Mediterranean Sea; the drama of Eritrea, enslaved by the dictatorship of Isaias Afewerki, because all those dead were Eritreans.

The first "point" was answered with Mare Nostrum, the mandate to the Italian Navy to patrol the Mediterranean up to the edge of Libyan territorial waters, to render aid to boats of migrants in distress and to prevent and avoid other massacres like the one in Lampedusa. That operation was a boast for our Navy, with thousands of lives saved. Ten years later, not only is there nothing left of it, but it almost seems that much of the political milieu considers it a waste or even an aid given to traffickers.

The fact remains that exactly twelve months later, in November 2014, Mare Nostrum was "canceled," multiplying – just as the Navy had predicted – the shipwrecks and casualties, including the immense tragedy of April 15, 2015, with some 800 victims, the highest death toll ever recorded in the Mediterranean in a shipwreck. And, in place of that salvation operation, regulations, and restrictions have gradually been introduced that not even the escalation of victims has been able to stop, even to the point of outsourcing the borders of Fortress Europe further and further south, to Africa and the Middle East, through a whole series of international treaties, to block refugees in the middle of the Sahara, "out of the spotlight," before they can even get to embark on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

This is what treaties such as the Khartoum Process (a photocopy of the previous Rabat Process), the Malta Accords, the treaty with Turkey, the rejection pact with Sudan, the blackmail to Afghanistan (forced to "take back" 80,000 refugees), the memorandum signed with Libya in February 2017 and the latest measures of this government have done and are doing. Not to mention the criminalization of NGOs, to whom we owe about 40 percent of the thousands of lives saved, but who have been forced to suspend their activities, even going so far as to pressure Panama to revoke the sailing flag of the Aquarius. Today we are seeing rescued ships forced to sail innumerable miles in search of assigned ports far from the places of intervention. The closest and safest port under international maritime law is a dead letter now. Massacres have been going on for the

past decade like nothing, cynicism has supplanted Humanitarianism.

With the Eritrean refugees, the second "point" is how we have gone from solidarity to derision or even contempt, to the point of calling them – in the words of influential members of the current governing majority – "vacationing refugees" or "migrants to make a good life," in order to deny the reality of the dictatorship in Asmara. It is a process that began immediately, already in the aftermath of the tragedy, when at the funeral ceremony for the victims, in Agrigento, the government invited the Eritrean ambassador to Rome, the man who represents and is the voice in Italy of the very regime that forced those 368 young people to flee the country. It could have seemed like a "gaffe." Instead, it turned out to be the beginning of a path of gradual rapprochement and re-evaluation of Isaias Afewerki, the dictator who enslaved his people, bringing them out of international isolation, associating them with the Khartoum Process and other agreements, sending them hundreds of millions of euros in funding, electing them de facto anti-immigration gendarme on behalf of Italy and Europe.

Both regarding migrants in general and Eritrea, then, ten years after the tragedy of that October 3, 2013, the bitter taste of betrayal remains.

- Betrayed memory and respect for the 368 young victims and all their family members and friends.
- Betrayed are the thousands of young people who by their very flight denounce the fierce, terrible reality of the regime in Asmara, which remains a

dictatorship even after peace was signed with Ethiopia over the very long border war that began in 1998.

- Betrayed is the cry of pain that rises from Africa and the Middle East to Italy and Europe from an entire people of migrants forced to leave their land: a flight for life that often stems from situations created by the politics and economic and geostrategic interests of the very states of the Global North that are now raising barriers. Betrayed, this cry of pain, at the very moment when one pretends not to see an obvious reality:

***"...you leave home alone / when home won't let you stay anymore / No one leaves home unless home kicks you out / fire under your feet / hot blood in your belly / something you never thought you'd do / until the scythe marked your neck with threats..."***

**from *Home*, a monologue by Giuseppe Cederna**

That's it: wherever we want to remember the Lampedusa tragedy these days, on the island itself or anywhere else, it will be meaningless to do so unless we want to turn this sad anniversary into a starting point to radically change the policy conducted over the past five years toward migrants and refugees. The "last of the earth."



*CommemorAction in Oujda. 2020. Photo: Alarm Phone*

## TEN YEARS AFTER THE TWO HORRIBLE SHIPWRECKS IN OCTOBER 2013

THE MURDEROUS EU BORDER REGIME NEVER STOPPED KILLING...

*By Hagen Kopp (Alarm Phone)*

Two large, horrible shipwrecks took place ten years ago near Lampedusa. 368 people drowned on the 3rd of October 2013 close to the shores of the Italian island. Eight days later, after politicians' crocodile tears in front of the hundreds of coffins had just dried, the authorities did not follow the desperate SOS calls of another boat about 70 nautical miles south off Lampedusa. 268 people died on the 11th of October 2013, because Italian and Maltese coast guards and navy refused assistance. An Italian naval vessel only 17 nautical miles away was deliberately ordered to NOT approach the scene by the Italian Maritime Rescue Operations Centre.

Against this background in December 2022, more than nine years after this crime, the Court of Rome ruled that the Italian coast guard and navy were guilty of manslaughter and negligence, resulting in failure to rescue and thus responsible for the death of the 268 refugees. The two Captains accused were finally not convicted because the case was time-barred, as the trial was brought beyond the limitations period. However, a landmark court ruling confirmed once again: people in distress at sea must always be rescued from drowning! But what have been the consequences?

Latest, since the 2017-deal between Italy and Libyan militias, a systematic push- and pull-back regime was established. Thus every day the lives of people, for whom safe passages remain blocked, are under additional risk. Non-assistance in the meanwhile became a daily practice of Maltese and Italian coast guards. Thousands of refugees and migrants have died or perished by drowning during the last years. A cruel deterrent policy was and is the norm and two more recent tragedies underline the continuity of the deathly "shield of Europe" (von der Leyen).

On 26th of February 2023 at least 94 people drowned near Cutro at the coast of Calabria. On 14th of June 2023 more than 600 refugees and migrants disappeared at sea near the Greek island of Pylos. In both cases the respective authorities did not react in time or even - as stated by several Pylos survivors - directly caused the shipwreck by towing the vessel. It's pure hypocrisy, when politicians appear dismayed after such massacres at sea. Every 3rd of October we still can follow the same pseudo show. The true faces of politicians like von der Leyen or Meloni come out when they try to buy a Tunisian president for the further brutalization of the border regime. Or when they threaten - whatever it should mean - with naval sea blockades.

**About the 11 October 2013 shipwreck:**

[https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/01/19/landmark-court-ruling-on-2013-shipwreck/?post\\_type=release\\_type=post](https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/01/19/landmark-court-ruling-on-2013-shipwreck/?post_type=release_type=post)

*CommemorAction in Palermo  
2021. Photo: Alarm Phone*



Together with survivors and relatives of the victims we will not stop denouncing the responsible politicians and authorities for the ongoing massacres. A medium to mourn, to remember, and to accuse in the same time are CommemorActions.

One more will take place for the anniversary of the shipwrecks in October 2023 in Lampedusa.

## ARRIVALS IN LAMPEDUSA: SOLIDARITY AND RESISTANCE IN THE FACE OF EUROPE'S RECEPTION CRISIS!

### Joint statement signed by more than 80 organisations - 18 September 2023

More than 5,000 people and 112 boats: this is the number of arrivals recorded on the Italian island of Lampedusa on Tuesday September 12. The boats, most of which arrived autonomously, originated in Tunisia or Libya. In total, more than 118,500 people have reached the Italian coast since the start of the year, almost double the 64,529 recorded during the same period in 2022. The accumulation of numbers does not make us forget that, behind each number, there is a human being, an individual story and that people still lose their life trying to reach Europe.

While Lampedusa has long been a destination for the boats of hundreds of people seeking refuge in Europe, the island's reception facilities are lacking. On Tuesday, the chaotic rescue of a boat caused the death of a 5-month-old baby, who fell into the water and immediately drowned, while dozens of boats continued to dock in the commercial port. For several hours, hundreds of people remained stranded on the pier, without water or food, before being transferred to the Lampedusa hotspot.

The hotspot, a triage center where those who just arrived are kept away from the local population and pre-identified before being transferred to the mainland, with its 389 places, has no capacity whatsoever to welcome with dignity the people arriving on the island on a daily basis. Since Tuesday, the center's staff have been completely overwhelmed by the presence of 6,000 people. The Red Cross and staff from other organizations have been prevented from entering the facility for "safety reasons".

On Thursday morning, many people began to escape from the hotspot by jumping the fences due to the inhumane situation that was being experienced. Meanwhile, in the face of the Italian authorities' failure to provide a dignified welcome, local solidarity has taken over. Many locals have mobilized to organize food distributions for those who have taken refuge in the town.

In addition, different organizations are also denouncing the political crisis in Tunisia as well as the humanitarian emergency in the city of Sfax, from where most of the boats leave for Italy. Right now

about 500 people sleep in Beb Jebli Square, with hardly any access to food or medical assistance. Most have been forced to flee Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Chad, Eritrea or Niger. Since the racist statements of Tunisia's president, Kais Saied, many migrants have been expelled from their homes and jobs. Others have been deported to the desert where some have died of thirst.

While these mass deportations are ongoing and the situation in Sfax continues to deteriorate, the EU agreed to a new migration deal with the Tunisian government three months ago in order to cooperate "more effectively on migration", border management and "anti-smuggling" measures, with an envelope of over 100 million euros. The EU agreed to this new deal in full knowledge of the atrocities that the Tunisian government has carried out, including the attacks perpetrated by the Tunisian coast guards on migrant boats.

Meanwhile, we observe with concern how the different European governments are closing their doors and failing to comply with asylum laws and the most basic human rights. While the French Interior Minister has announced his intention to strengthen controls at the Italian border, several other EU Member States also declared that they would close their doors. In August, the German authorities decided to stop the selection processes for asylum seekers arriving in Germany from Italy under the "voluntary solidarity mechanism".

Invited to Lampedusa on Sunday by the prime minister Meloni, European Commission President Von der Leyen announced a 10-point action plan that confirms this securitarian response. Reinforcing controls at sea to the detriment of the obligation to rescue, increasing the pace of expulsions and stepping up the process of outsourcing borders... all old recipes that the European Union has been implementing for decades and which have proved their failure, only aggravating the crisis of solidarity and the situation of people on the move.

The undersigned organizations call for an open and welcoming Europe and urge the EU Member states to provide safe and legal pathways and dignified reception conditions. We demand that urgent action be taken in Lampedusa and that international laws that protect the right to asylum be complied with. We are devastated by the continuous deaths at sea caused by the EU border policies and reaffirm our solidarity with people on the move!

List of signatories <https://civilmrcc.eu/joint-statement-arrivals-in-lampedusa/>

*People on the move arrived in Lampedusa, September 2023.  
Photo: Maldusa*

**“ We are devastated by the continuous deaths at sea caused by the EU border policies and reaffirm our solidarity with people on the move! “**



# SOLIDARITY WITH THE VICTIMS OF THE LIBYAN FLOODING

CLIMATE JUSTICE MUST BE ANTI-RACIST AND ANTI-COLONIAL.

## Solidarity statement published on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2023

We stand in solidarity with the people of Eastern Libya, who are now facing a devastating situation.

Eastern Libya, and particularly the city of Darnah, was destroyed by the same storm (Daniel) that caused devastations in Greece (as well as Bulgaria and Turkey) just a few days earlier - where our friends and comrades were harmed by the floods, and where thousands of people without papers went missing without anybody trying to rescue them.

In Libya, these unprecedented floods caused the failure of two dams on 11 September 2023, destroying a large part of Darnah and killing thousands of people. Tens of thousands of people are still reported missing, probably trapped under the floods and with little or no hope to be found alive.

More than ten thousand people were taken away by flooding within just a few hours. But in Italy, Europe and the rest of the world, not many seem to pay attention. Similarly to what happened in Morocco a few days earlier, these tragedies and deaths are not considered newsworthy, as if it was all happening in some "far away land" where "horrible things happen", outside of European control/responsibility.

What would have happened if these events hit a European country or killed European citizens?

Libya is very close to Italy and Greece, it shares the same waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and it has a historical relationship to Italy due to its violent colonisation.

But similarly to the massacres happening in this Sea that we all share, where tens of thousands of people have drowned, nobody seems to care about the fate of the people drowned in this latest climate catastrophe, of those who survived it, and of those who are working incessantly to search for survivors, or recovering bodies to return to families and friends. Again, we see how racism defines the value of life and death, whose lives matter and whose lives are considered disposable.

On Italian news (Rainews), Darnah was described as a city "modernized by Italian colonization." Not only does this reveal a total lack of historical consciousness, but it also reveals a celebration of colonialism as a motor of civilization rather than as one of the driving forces for the current political and economic instability. An instability that led to the mismanagement of the dams and to poor housing conditions, which exacerbated the tragic consequences of the floodings.

Floods and their consequences are not simply natural disasters and do not affect everyone equally. They are the direct result of climate change. A climate change that is colonial and neo-colonial in its causes, fueled by the greed for profit and extractivist practices in the Global North, but affecting mostly the Global South, with a clear racial divide between who is benefitting from capitalist exploitation of our planet and who is killed, displaced, or forced to migrate because of it.

The so-called climate crisis is in fact a capitalist crisis and a colonial crisis. It is also a racist crisis.

In expressing our solidarity with all the people affected by this massacre, we call for a deeper intersection of our struggle for justice, as there is no climate justice without decolonization, without anti-racist struggles, without no-border migrant justice.

### List of signatories

<https://www.maldusa.org/l/solidarity-with-the-victims-of-the-libyan-flooding-climate-justice-must-be-anti-racist-and-anti-colonial/>



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