



Civil MRCC

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

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N°6

May
2023

ECHOES



From the Central Mediterranean

Picture: Onboard the Ocean Viking, Nissim Gasteli

P.2 – INTRODUCTION

The Italian contradiction

P.8 – ANALYSIS

Navigating the SAR challenges
and coordination issues off
eastern Libya

P.13 – LEGAL FRAGMENT

The Asso Ventotto case

P. 14 – AMPLIFYING VOICES

“If we stay, we are going to die”-
refugees protesting in front of
the UNHCR office in Tunis

P.16 – CRIMINALISATION

El Hiblu 3 four years on!

P.20– MOBILISATIONS

Joint statement on Tunisia /
Refugees in Libya / Performance
in Brussels *“We kindly request
you to stop killing”*

A HIGHLY CONTESTED SPACE

While the welcoming of refugees from Ukraine demonstrates that another approach with free movement and free choice is always possible, the racist policy of externalising and brutalising the European border regime in the south blatantly continues. At the same time, an increasing number of boats reached close to Italian shores without any support, an expression of a contested space in which the autonomies of migration remain constantly alive.

Despite and against the post-fascist Meloni government, which is backed up by EU-policies, money and Frontex operations, people exercise their right to move against all risks, obstacles and state-led border crimes. Italian Coast Guard units are forced to coordinate rescues in international waters, while the civil fleet appears with even more rescue ships than last year. We have to expect a „hot“ summer - beyond the climate crisis - and the future is unwritten. In any case, the struggle to abolish the inhuman borders will continue.

During the first 4 months of the year 2023:

- 45.089 people **arrived in Italy** by boat, of which a significant number arrived autonomously (UNHCR figure until 14th of May)
- 3.175 people were **rescued** by the civil fleet from 44 boats in distress (CMRCC figure)
- 5.058 people were **pushed back** to Libya after they were intercepted by the EU-supported so-called Libyan Coast Guard (IOM figures until the 15th of May)
- 975 **died** or are reported missing (IOM figure).

LATEST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

ITALY: REAL AND APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS IN A CONTESTED SPACE

By Mediterranea Saving Humans

As accustomed as we are to the bizarre, inappropriate and sometimes offensive statements of the Italian Minister of the Interior, the sentence pronounced by Matteo Piantedosi last March 25th in front of the 'School of Political Education' of the racist Lega party aroused bitter irony. In fact, in answering the question "*why so many landings of migrants especially in Italy?*", the minister said that, unlike other European countries that have been united in rejecting migrants, "*there is also the attractive factor of a public opinion that includes the acceptance of this phenomenon.*" We think that Piantedosi's words should instead be taken seriously, because they are an explicit admission of the temporary failure of the current government's racist propaganda of closure and exclusion. The open and welcoming orientation of Italian public opinion comes from afar, but it has certainly been confirmed and strengthened by what we have called here the "Cutro effect" (*Echoes#5*, March 2023). And the current social atmosphere is certainly different from what it was in the summer of 2018, at the beginning of the "closed ports" policy.

It is undoubtedly a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of other factors, but it is clear that, at this stage, after the Cutro massacre, the Italian government must try to avoid the deaths at sea of people on the move, because politically it would risk paying too high a price in terms of consensus. This explains why the orders of politicians cannot prevent the Italian Coast Guard from operating extensively with rescues inside and often outside their SAR zone of competence. This as we have seen in recent weeks with direct activity along the route from Tunisia to south-west of the island of Lampedusa or on the route from eastern Libya (Cyrenaica), also with the coordination of merchant vessels by MRCC Rome and the subsequent transshipments and disembarkations of people in Italy.

Of course, strategically their policy does not change. On the contrary. On land as well as at sea. The violent externalisation of the management of the European borders remains the guiding star for the Italian government, as well as the governments of other member states and EU institutions. A frenetic diplomatic and police activity is underway to strengthen and extend the business model to eastern Libya and Tunisia, already applied from 2017 onwards with the militias connected to the Tripoli government - meaning support, funding and cooperation with local authorities aimed at preventing departures, more interceptions and captures

at sea, and the consequential deportations back to detention camps. This is the significance of General Haftar's meeting with Prime Minister Meloni in Rome on May 4th, and Minister Piantedosi's visit to President Saïed in Tunis on May 15th. For the moment, for eastern Libya and Tunisia, it is not yet yielding the inhuman results hoped for by the government, but that is their perspective. Against the ships of the civil fleet, they are attempting all kinds of hindrances, starting with the tactic of "distant ports" and temporary seizures.

Similarly, with the shameful "Cutro" decree they would also like to operate on land: introducing new forms of criminalization, dramatically reducing the granting of residence permits in Italy for "special protection", spreading the hot-spot model, multiplying the administrative detention centres (CPR) with the aim of having one in every Italian region, and incentivising and organising more repatriations and deportations to so-called "safe countries".

But even here the contradiction is at work. With the declaration of a "state of emergency" (April 11th, 2023) once again, the government wants to affirm the character of exceptionality in the management of immigration as an "invasion" and a problem of public order, and to equip themselves with more authoritarian instruments to deal with it. But at the same time, with the measures announced and the involvement of the Civil Protection Department and the Red Cross to manage arrivals on Lampedusa, the demands of the *Maldusa* project and other non-institutional actors operating on the island for a dignified reception and rapid transfers to the continent could even become reality.

This accumulation of contradictions seems to describe a contradictory scenario in Italy. For it is under the most right-wing government in the history of the Republic, led by (post)fascist proponents, champions of "ethnic replacement" propaganda, that a significant number of arrivals are being recorded on Italian shores. How can the ambivalence of the current scenario in the central Mediterranean can be explained?

The global context of war and multiple crises (climate and energy, economic, food and social) nourish the autonomy and endurance of the people on the move, an articulate and multiform collective intelligence capable of continually challenging the border regime, as in an ungovernable cat-and-mouse contest. In connection with this, the bottom-up construction of social

infrastructures for the freedom of movement has developed and is developing a growing capacity for monitoring and observation, increasingly able of timely intervention in pointing out rights violations by states and governments. Every single life saved is fundamental, but in this sense the action of the civil fleet shows its crucial effectiveness not so much in the statistics of people rescued directly at sea, but in its permanent capacity to denounce and continuously put pressure on the institutional authorities, as a sort of dynamic “counter-power”. Finally, as noted above, the

multiplicity of solidarity voices - from very different cultural and religious, social and political backgrounds - builds that “welcoming public opinion” that functions as a veritable watchdog of government policies.

It is then at the heart of these contradictions that, at sea as on land, a new grassroots migration policy can counter the terrible burden of suffering and death that European states and governments would like to continue to impose.



IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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

MARCH 2023

7 March

Following a distress call received through the **Alarm Phone**, the **Life Support** (Emergency) rescues 105 people from a rubber boat fleeing Libya (1).

24 March

After **Alarm Phone** forwarded a distress call from 190 people in distress, with the help of **Louise Michel**, the **Geo Barents** (Médecins Sans Frontières) is able to rescue the group from a wooden boat which departed from Libya (2).

Directly after, **Louise Michel** heads to a 78-person boat which has been spotted by the civil aircraft **Seabird 2** (Sea-Watch). **Louise Michel** is able to take everybody on board, even with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard trying to intervene (3).

On her way north, the **Louise Michel** rescues two more boats which fled Tunisia. The boats had been found by **Seabird 2** as well as Frontex, who sent out one of their very rare mayday relays.

25 March

Life Support rescues 78 people from a rubber boat which departed from Libya. **Alarm Phone** received the distress call and had forwarded it to authorities and NGOs.

26 March

Life Support rescues 83 people from two iron boats in distress on the way from Tunisia towards Lampedusa.



EMERGENCY
@emergency.org

1

#LifeSupport 105 naufraghi salvati nella notte: 59 uomini, 17 donne (di cui una al settimo mese di gravidanza), 4 bambini accompagnati e 25 minori non accompagnati. Assegnato #Brindisi come #porto di sbarco. Leggi: bit.ly/3kPDqxu #Med

MSF Sea
@MSFSea

2

Following last night's rescue, #Italy assigned us #Bari as a place of safety to disembark the 190 survivors currently aboard #GeoBarents. It will take us 2,5 days to reach the port that is located 595 nautical miles/1100 km from our current position.

LouiseMichel
@MVLouiseMichel

3

1/2 Breaking: This morning, the civilian aircraft #Seabird operated by @seawatchcrew, spotted a wooden double decker boat with 78 people on board. The Louise Michel arrived, stabilised the boat and handed out lifejackets.

APRIL 2023

9 April

The sailing ship **Nadir** (RESQSHIP) attends to a shipwreck off Lampedusa and is able to rescue 22 people and to recover two bodies. Unfortunately, around 20 people also went missing (4).

15 April

After **Seabird 2** finds a rubber boat in distress, the **Life Support** as the closest vessel rescues the 55 people (5).

19 April

Alarm Phone receives a distress call and forwards it to authorities and NGOs. The **Humanity 1** (SOS Humanity) rescues the 65 people and disembarks them in Italy (6).

20 April

The **Ocean Viking** (SOS Méditerranée) rescues 29 people in distress who had previously reached out to **Alarm Phone**. They had departed from eastern Libya and were in the midst of a 5-day ordeal towards Sicily (7).

24 April

While the **Geo Barents** finds 75 people on a rubber boat, the sailing ship **Astral** (Open Arms) rescues 47 people from a sinking iron boat (8) (9).

26 April

The **Nadir** rescues 40 people from an iron boat and disembarks them in Lampedusa.

27 April

The **Astral** rescues 38 people in distress who had fled Tunisia, as well as assisting another two boats which were finally taken care of by the Italian Coast Guard (10).

At the same time, the **Ocean Viking** rescues 15 people who had departed from Libya.

28 April

After the **Alarm Phone** receives and forwards several distress calls to authorities and NGOs, the **Ocean Viking** is able to rescue 153 people from three different boats (11).

29 April

After **Seabird 2** spots 34 people in distress, the **Life Support** rescues the group and disembarks everybody safely in Italy.



4



RESQSHIP
@resqship

[1/4] Nach Std. ununterbrochener Einsätze, wurde unsere Crew erneut zu einem Seenotfall alarmiert. Als sie am Einsatzort ankamen, fanden sie etwa 25 Menschen im Wasser vor - sie waren bereits seit ca. zwei Stunden im Wasser. Unsere Crew konnte 22 Überlebende und 2 Tote bergen.

5



Sea-Watch International
@seawatch_intl

With the Seabird, we discovered two boats in distress yesterday. After our aircrew sent the distress call, @emergency_ngo rescued the 55 people from the overcrowded inflatable boat a few hours later.



SOS Humanity (international)
@soshumanity_en

6

[1/2] After rescuing 69 people, one unconscious and others exhausted, seasick, and suffering from hypothermia, we were assigned the port of [#Ravenna](#), over 1,600km from the rescue. This creates unnecessary risk for survivors and keeps ships away from the [#SAR](#) region for many days.



SOS MEDITERRANEE
@SOSMedIntl

7

Rescue completed! The 29 survivors on [#OceanViking](#) finally disembarked this morning in [#Bari](#). We are relieved they finally reach a Place of Safety after spending 5 days at sea without assistance and in dire conditions in the [#CentralMediterranean](#).



Open Arms
@openarms_fund

8

Desembarcamos en [#Lampedusa](#)
Las 47 personas que han sobrevivido hacinados en una barca metálica a 2 días en el [#Med](#), la deriva y el naufragio, por fin ya están en puerto seguro.
Proteger la vida en el mar es nuestra prioridad, las vidas humanas lo más importante
[#CadaVidaCuenta](#)



MSF Sea
@MSF_Sea

9

As [#GeoBarents](#) is sailing north towards [#Napoli](#), the place of safety assigned by [#Italy](#), the 75 women, men and children onboard are recovering after the risky journey they endured. Reclaiming moments of normalcy and human solidarity before arriving to the new destination.



Open Arms ENG
@openarms_fund

10

Last night [#Astral](#) located and helped a dinghy carrying 38 people (including minors) not long after setting sail from [#Lampedusa](#). Tens of people drowned in another shipwreck yesterday near [#Libya](#) This isn't the sea, it's a graveyard for the most vulnerable people.
[#EveryLifeCounts](#)



SOS MEDITERRANEE
@SOSMedIntl

11

[#OceanViking](#) performed 3 rescues in less than 7h in Maltese Search & Rescue Region alerted by [@alarm_phone](#). The Search & Rescue operations were all closely coordinated by Italian maritime authorities. [@SOSMedIntl](#) has been calling for such vital coordination efforts for years.

24.03.2023 - CIVIL FLEET VESSELS AND AIRCRAFT WORK TOGETHER TO RESCUE AN OVERCROWDED WOODEN BOAT WITH TWO DECKS

During the morning of the 24th April, Sea-Watch's aircraft **Seabird 2** spotted an overcrowded wooden boat carrying at least 40 people without life vests, with the potential estimated by the aircrew that the boat could have been carrying more people within a lower deck. Frontex' Heron drone had also been observed approximately 1.5 hours earlier by Seabird's ground crew orbiting a position which would match with the trajectory of the boat in distress, though a rescue operation from authorities for the people in distress was nowhere to be seen at the time of Seabird's spotting.

Seabird's ground crew then informed the authorities as well as civil rescue vessel **Louise Michel**, which was at the time approximately 40 nautical miles away from the people. During the transit time of the Louise Michel, Seabird's air and ground crews monitored the situation, updating the vessel and the authorities, which as can sadly be expected, remained silent. As the Louise Michel arrived on scene, it was revealed that the boat in distress was indeed a highly dangerous double decked vessel, carrying 78 people, almost double the figure which Seabird 2 had initially counted on the vessel from the air, where among the people in distress were women, children and a baby. These types of boats are prone to capsizing when overcrowded and present rescue crews with a heightened risk, where the unstable vessels must

be disembarked with extreme caution in order to prevent panic and loss of life. Carefully stabilising the situation on board of the vessel and handing out lifejackets, the crew of the Louise Michel then considered whether to wait for another larger civil rescue vessel, the **Life Support**, to also arrive on scene and begin embarking the large number of people.

The sudden arrival of a so-called Libyan Coastguard vessel on scene then caused a deterioration of the already tense situation, with the Libyan crews spreading fear and panic among the people. The Louise Michel crew, then, made the call to embark all the people from the boat, lest the Libyan vessel made any potentially lethal interventions or influences on the situation. Very fortunately given the scenario, all people could be safely embarked upon the Louise Michel without incident or loss of life, to be treated by the crew's medics before eventually being disembarked in the safe harbour of Lampedusa, Italy.

Even with the knowledge and presence of surface and air assets from authorities, the situation could well have again involved drownings, disappearances and human rights violations, had it not been for the operability of two of the civil fleet's vessels and one of its reconnaissance aircraft, the only assets which can be trusted to operate within international human rights and maritime laws, and to intervene with the aim of upholding the safety and lives of highly vulnerable people

09.04.2023 - SEVERAL SURVIVORS OF A SHIPWRECK OFF LAMPEDUSA ARE RESCUED BY A CIVIL FLEET VESSEL

In yet another tragic and wholly avoidable scenario, three people lost their lives and several others are feared dead after a boat carrying people on the move was shipwrecked off Lampedusa, Italy.

Had it not been for the intervention of an operative civil fleet vessel however, the outcome could have been yet more profoundly deadly. After being alerted by an Italian Coast Guard patrol vessel during the night, the civil fleet sailing vessel **Nadir** was able to arrive at the scene of a shipwreck involving around 40 people, finding multiple people in the water and undertaking emergency rescue action and medical treatment for the survivors. 22 people were ultimately saved and embarked upon the Nadir, including a pregnant woman. It is feared by the vessel's crew, however, that at least 20 more people drowned as a result of the incident.

Sea-Watch's airborne operations ground crew were able to track the Frontex light aircraft Osprey 3 performing a search operation in the area of the tragedy during the morning, however the actions of the authorities are all too often too little and too late in light of the continuously lethal conditions in the Mediterranean region for people on the move.

As we continue to maintain within the civil fleet, the central Mediterranean urgently requires a Europe-led rescue programme involving air and surface assets, operating with the primary aim of upholding the right to life and other international conventions, in order to avoid further human catastrophes such as this one which continue to take place every month on the water.

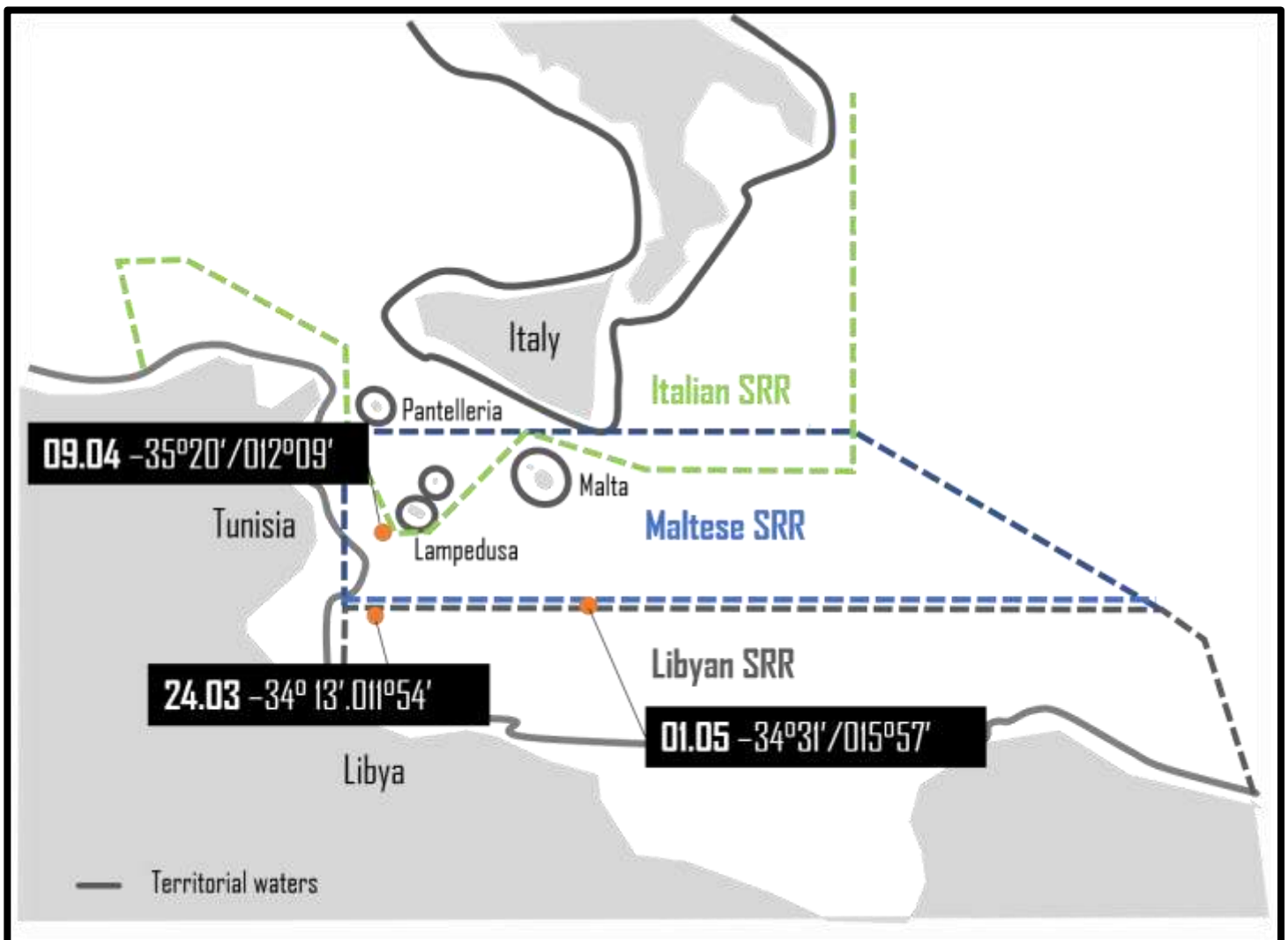
01.05.2023 - LARGE RESCUE FOR GEO BARENTS IN SAR 3 AFTER ALERT FROM ALARM PHONE

During the early hours of the 1st May, the **Alarm Phone** was contacted by people in distress aboard an overcrowded boat carrying around 300 persons on the move. The boat was in the Maltese search and rescue region, south-east of the Maltese islands in the ever more active region of the central Mediterranean known as SAR 3. As Alarm Phone made repeated alerts to the authorities, the same expected and shamefully repeated pattern unwound itself yet again from the sides of the Maltese and Italian rescue coordination centres – silence and the refusal to act in accordance with their legal obligations and duties.

It was only once again possibly the saving grace for many lives, then, that a vessel from the civil fleet, the powerful **Geo Barents** of MSF, was operative and available to assist in this expansive eastern region. In transit for over 86 nautical miles of distance, the Geo Barents thankfully was able to successfully respond to the relay of distress information from the Alarm Phone which those responsible had chosen to ignore. Sea-Watch's reconnaissance aircraft **Seabird 1** was also able to provide essential information to the Geo Barents crew

from the air, verifying the position of the people in distress and providing confirmations about the structure and condition of the vessel, so that the MSF rescue teams were able to most effectively prepare for what would be a challenging and hazardous rescue of so many people on board. Thanks then to the training, professionalism and preparedness of the civil fleet's air and sea crews, all people on board were ultimately embarked to the Geo Barents in order to receive medical attention and await disembarkation to a safe port in Europe.

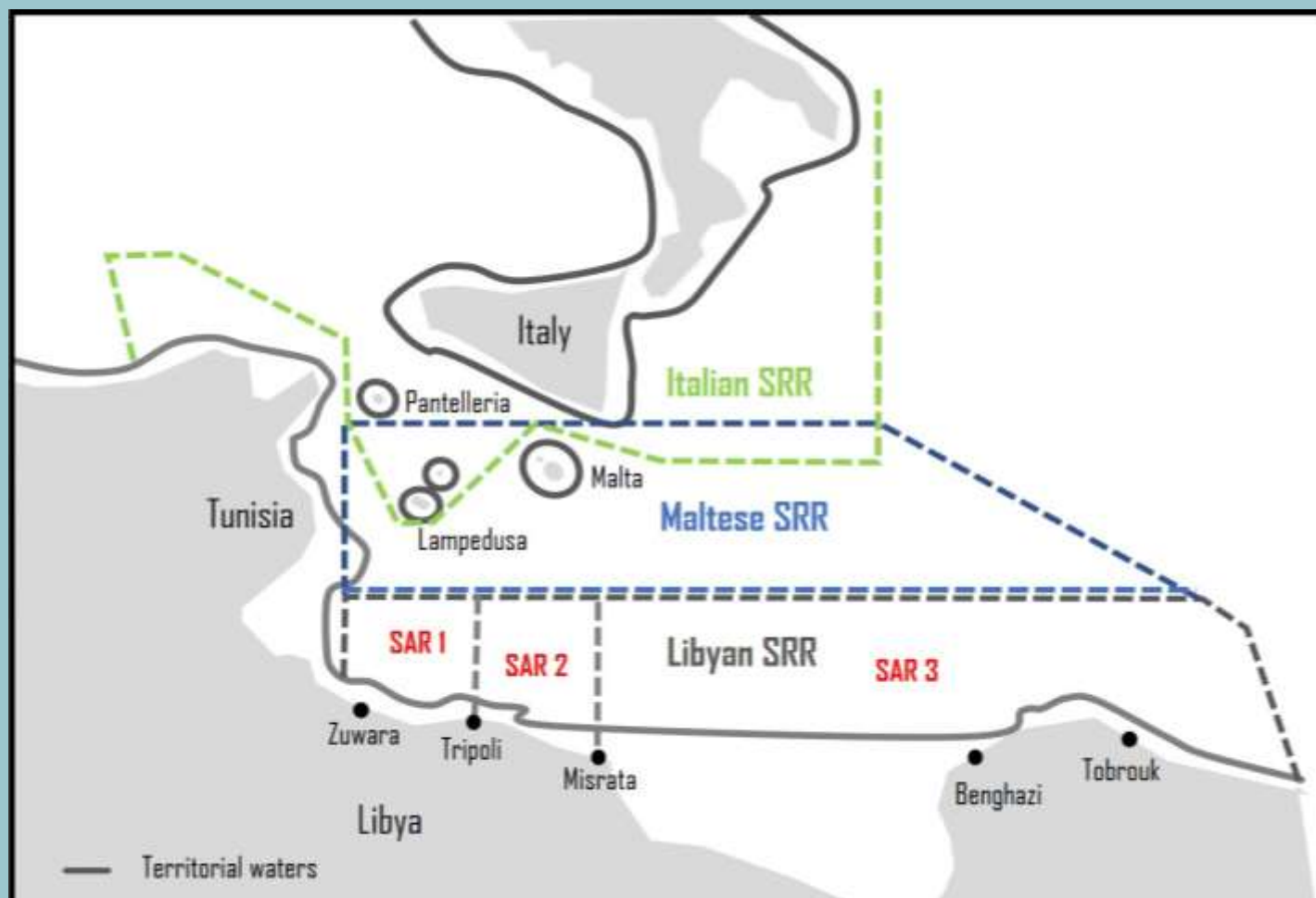
In yet another case of lives upheld at sea by the civil fleet under dire circumstances, within a context that continues to escalate and worsen at the behest of a system which only aims to prevent arrivals to Europe at any cost, it is to the benefit of human rights and justice that the civil fleet is yet still able in terms of finances and personnel to operate – may it continue to be adequately supported in the months and years to come as the adversity of a spineless European border regime remains in place.



ANALYSIS

NAVIGATING THE SAR CHALLENGES AND COORDINATION ISSUES OFF EASTERN LIBYA: IS "SAR 3" A NEW OPERATIONS AREA FOR NGO SHIPS?

By Alarm Phone



Between 2022 and 2023, a considerable increase in boat departures from eastern Libya has been observed. This route was one of the more frequently used prior to 2017. At that time, many boats were departing from the region of Alexandria, Egypt, allowing people from the Horn of Africa and Sudan to avoid entering Libya. The distance to the Italian coast is nearly 800 nautical miles, with a sailing time of typically 8-10 days.

Departures from this region dramatically decreased in 2018, only to resume four years later in late 2021, possibly reflecting geopolitical developments. Presently, the main departure points for boats crossing from eastern Libya to Italy are the northern urban and periurban areas along the region's northern coasts, namely Benghazi, Darna and Tobruk. The shortest distance from eastern Libya to Italy is the 365 nautical miles from Benghazi to Capo Passero, the south-eastern corner of Sicily.

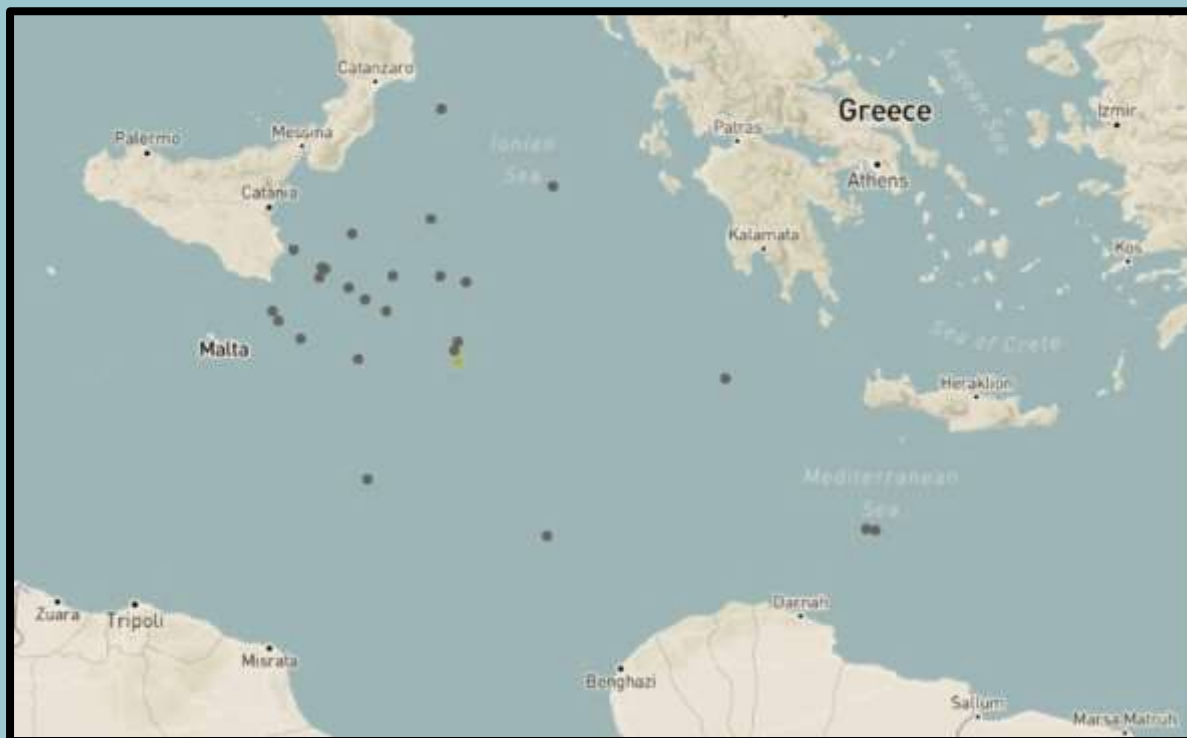
The boats departing from eastern Libya are however not the only vessels sailing in the region. Various types of vessels departing from Lebanon and Turkey and heading towards the Ionian Italian coasts might also traverse this area. This is a consequence of the aggressive measures implemented by government actors along the borders with Greece and Cyprus to prevent arrivals or forcibly return those who manage to reach their national waters and land.

Different types of vessels have then been observed on this route. In general, boats departing from Benghazi are typically small fibreglass boats with a single deck and no cabin, equipped with one or two outboard engines, and carrying around 20 to 40 people on board. Boats departing from Darna and Tobruk often appear as larger ex-fishing boats made from mixed materials, with inboard engines, and carrying several hundred people. Boats from Turkey typically include sailing yachts with around one hundred passengers, although mid-sized power boats are also occasionally used. Motor pleasure

crafts and decommissioned ferries seem to be the most common boat types reported from Lebanon.

The route from eastern Libya crosses the eastern halves of both the Libyan and Maltese Search and Rescue Regions (SRRs) before reaching the Italian SRR in the Ionian Sea. The Italian and Maltese SRRs overlap from the 36° parallel up until 30 nautical miles further north. Starting from this point, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC) in Rome has been

coordinating the SAR operations. South of the 36° parallel, there is a lack of information and, most likely, SAR coordination. This becomes even more critical within the eastern half of the Libyan SRR, where the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) in Tripoli is effectively inactive in the area, possibly due to operational limitations (with a distance of around 250 nautical miles between Misrata and Benghazi) as well as the geopolitical situation in the region.



Maps showing last known positions for documented distress cases respectively departing (above) Benghazi, (below) Tobruk from 1.1.2022 - 1.4.2023. Pins coloured yellow for cases rescued by the Civil Fleet. Positions placed by CMRCC documentation and SARChive to the best of its knowledge, from a combination of available actor accounts and media analysis. Cases may be absent where information was unavailable.

Certain groups however, sometimes referred to as the "Libyan Coast Security" or "Libyan Special Naval Forces" but also a group named "Dafadie Albasharia", appear to be active in this area. Nonetheless, their role remains unclear and is not officially recognized by the international community (essentially the IMO).

On May 4th, Marshal Haftar, the "strongman" in the eastern Libyan region, held a meeting with the Italian Prime Minister and some of her ministers. Although no official communication followed the meeting, the official Italian government bulletin, providing a summary of the two-hour conversation, reported that the primary topic discussed was the unprecedented increase in immigration to Italy. It is speculated upon that the heightened volume of departures from eastern Libya may have been allowed by Marshal Haftar himself, in order to establish a position for engaging with European authorities, particularly Italy.

For the time being, the Italian MRCC is alerting merchant vessels sailing in the area about boats in distress via Inmarsat and possibly other means. In their communications, the officers in Rome specify that they are publishing the SAR case "on behalf of the Libyan Coast Guard." However, the coordination for most of these SAR cases relayed by IT MRCC and rescued by merchant vessels has ultimately been undertaken by the centre in Rome, resulting in disembarkations in Italy. As on May 10th, where in only one day around 350 people from several SAR events in the Ionian region were disembarked in Italy by four different merchant vessels. In fact, in a region where neither governmental nor non-governmental actors provide SAR operations, merchant vessels play an even more significant role.

However, the crews of commercial ships are not trained for mass casualty events, and a cargo ship is neither equipped nor suitable for such operations. It is worth mentioning that at least two fatal incidents occurred only within the first four months of 2023 while merchant ships were conducting the rescues of small fibreglass boats. The most recent incident took place in the Maltese SRR between April 16th and 17th, and another case occurred in the Libyan SRR on March 11th. The latter incident has been more comprehensively documented by civil actors, as the people on board had previously contacted Alarm Phone and aircraft Seabird could also spot them the day before the cargo ship FROLAND launched a rescue operation. Unfortunately, the small boat capsized during the rescue, and of the 47 people on board, only 17 could be embarked on the cargo ship and eventually disembarked in Pozzallo, Italy, while 30 people are still missing.

In addition, cargo vessels lack preparedness to provide accommodation and support for people rescued at sea,

and engaging in an active search and rescue operation until either a port is assigned for disembarking survivors or a rendezvous point is designated for transshipment to governmental assets is time-consuming. This delay often results in significant financial losses for shipowners, which frequently discourages the merchant vessels from responding to distress alerts, despite their legal obligations. In an Alarm Phone SAR case on May 6th of last year, the Sea-Eye 4 played a crucial role. They offered to transship the 34 survivors and take over the operation after the cargo ship BERLIN EXPRESS had deployed a life raft on scene and the BSG BAHAMAS had embarked the survivors. This coordinated effort aimed to minimise the impact on the cargo crew and shipowner, as well as ensure the welfare of those rescued and their disembarkation to Italy.

Indeed, it is important to state that rescues performed by merchant vessels carry a concrete risk of refoulement. Despite the lack of official SAR authority activity in SAR 3, the operations conducted by cargo ships in this area can still result in refoulement to Libya. At least two pushbacks to eastern Libya have recently taken place in the region. The role of the Italian MRCC in these pushbacks is questionable, however.

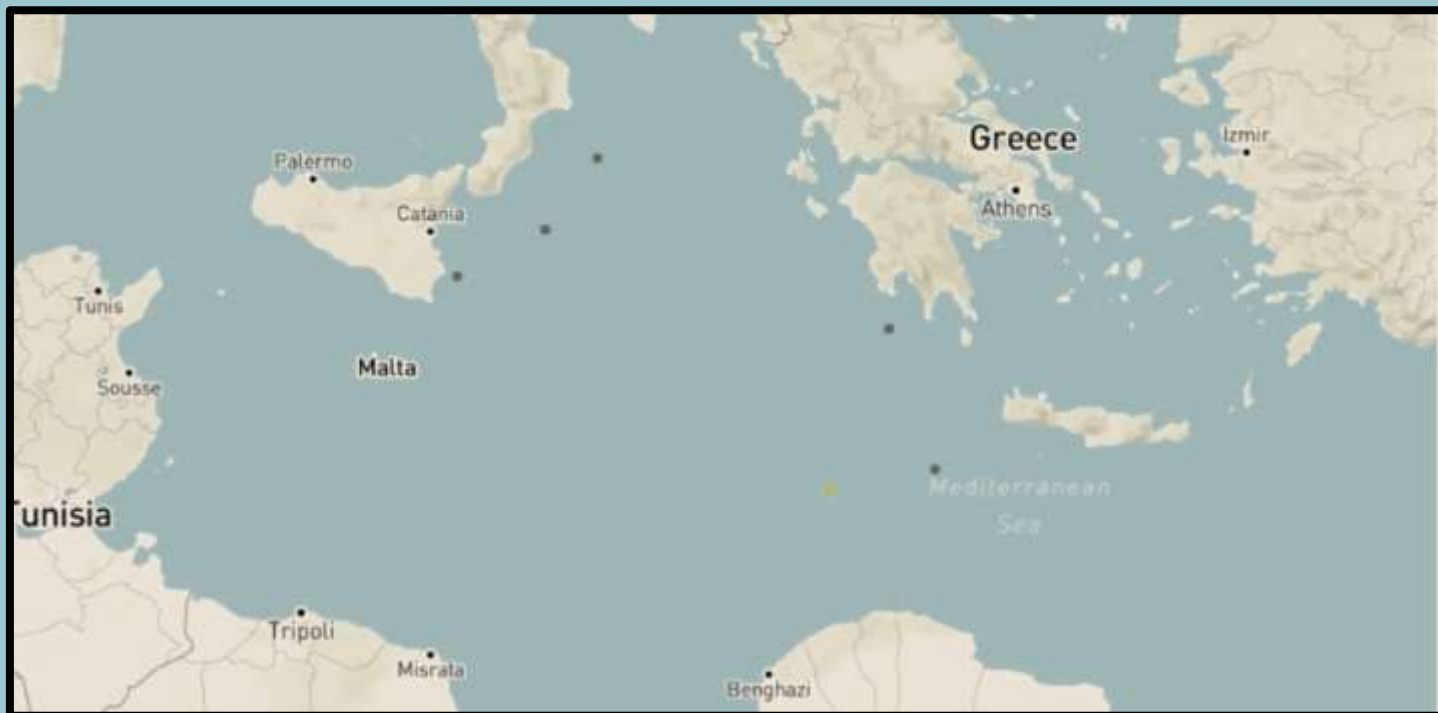
On April 29th, the crew of aircraft Seabird managed to make contact with the cargo ship GRIMSTAD, which had rescued around 30 people from a small boat. The officer on board reported that the coordination centre in Rome had instructed their vessel to disembark the survivors in Libya. However, the Italian MRCC publicly denied responsibility for the refoulement order (a parliamentary question on the matter is pending). It is possible that the MRCC in Rome did not directly instruct towards refoulement to Libya but rather towards coordinating with Libyan authorities. However, while the authorities in Tripoli invested in by the IMO consistently fail to coordinate such remote operations and leave the technical space for Rome to take over, in the case of the GRIMSTAD it can be surmised that the cargo ship managed to coordinate directly with forces active in the eastern region of the country, as it was the "Libyan Navy" that ultimately transshipped the survivors and brought them back to Libyan shores.

The lack of clear coordination between the coordination centre in Rome and the maritime forces operating in the region, and therefore their role in coordinating refoulements, is exemplified by another SAR case involving 18 people in distress off the shores of Benghazi. The centre in Rome issued a mayday relay for two days, from April 26th to 28th, while unofficial sources reported that an interception had already taken place on the first day of the alert. Many SAR events in this eastern half of the Libyan SRR relayed by Rome have been left unresolved, and it is presumed that many people have

been intercepted under local coordination. However, the recent visit of Marshal Haftar to Italy suggests that a stronger cooperation between Rome and Benghazi could soon be established.

Currently, there are no non-governmental rescue vessels operating systematically in this region. The technical and geographical challenges present significant deterrents to implementing a systematic Search and Rescue operation: the vast search surface, potentially covering around 300,000 square kilometres, makes conducting

systematic patrols without specific targets impractical. However, there have been instances of targeted rescue operations by non-governmental assets along this route. These rescues occurred when the SAR case and its position were known. In such cases, rescue ships deviated from their usual operational areas either to respond to boats abandoned at sea due to a lack of assistance, which is systematic in the eastern triangular region under Malta's coordination, or to assist unequipped merchant vessels unable to conduct rescues.



Map showing last known positions for documented distress cases departing Lebanon and Turkey from 1.1.2022 - 1.4.2023. Pins coloured yellow for cases rescued by the Civil Fleet. Positions placed by CMRCC documentation and SARChive to the best of its knowledge, from a combination of available actor accounts and media analysis. Cases may be absent where information was unavailable.

Several noteworthy operations have been carried out by NGOs. For example, in an Alarm Phone SAR case on April 4th of this year, a fishing vessel carrying 600 people was rescued by the Geo Barents, despite challenging weather conditions. Another case involved a pleasure craft that departed from Lebanon and was rescued by the Humanity 1 on September 13th of last year. In this instance, the rescue ship was located 20 hours away from the boat in distress when four people were reported to have jumped overboard in order to reach a cargo vessel which was standing by though unable to conduct a safe transshipment of the 207 people.

Eventually, the rescue ship managed to embark those still on the drifting motor boat and then transfer the individuals recovered from the water by the merchant vessel. After having been at sea for over a week, they were only able to disembark another week later in Taranto, Italy.

Just ten days prior to the intervention of Humanity 1 in this remote area of the Maltese SRR, another boat from

Lebanon was left adrift at sea for three days. The distress call, made to Alarm Phone and other actors on September 3rd, could not however get assistance from an NGO ship this time. Instead, it was again a merchant vessel, the BBC PEARL, which ultimately came to the rescue of the 57 people and disembarked them in Crete, Greece, only three days after the alert - too late however for a four-year-old girl who died of dehydration on her way to the hospital.

In light of the evident Search and Rescue gap in this region, the question of whether NGOs should operate more consistently in this area naturally arises. On the one hand, there is a clear need for NGO involvement in order to address the existing SAR gap and support people on the move. However, the technical and geographical challenges in SAR 3, such as the vast surface area and the specific configuration of Libyan territorial waters, introduce new complexities to the operational landscape, which precipitate a reevaluation of non-governmental operational strategies in this region.

LEGAL FRAGMENT

THE ASSO VENTOTTO CASE

Is the conduct of the captain of a private ship bringing rescued migrants back to Libya criminally relevant?

Giulia Crescini

The case at hand is exemplary and unique. For the first time in fact, the captain of an Italian merchant vessel, the Asso Ventotto of the Augusta offshore shipping company, has been convicted by the Court of Naples and then the Court of Appeals for bringing 101 shipwrecked migrants that he had previously rescued back to Libya. The exceptional nature of the case relates to the difficulty with which these events are brought before the courts, the problems in terms of collecting evidence and the consequent investigative difficulties.

For this case, two factors were crucial. On July 30th 2018, when the Asso Ventotto transferred migrants previously rescued in international waters to Tripoli, the operations were observed, recorded and commented upon by the Italian and European press, leading to a strong reaction from non-governmental and international organisations. Shortly afterwards, considering that the Asso Ventotto is an Italian-flagged ship and the shipping company, Augusta Offshore, is based in Naples, it was possible for the former mayor of Naples, Luigi De Magistris, together with civil society representatives, to present a complaint to the Naples prosecutor's office from which the criminal trial and the two convictions referred resulted.

The Naples Criminal Court, already in the first instance with a ruling on October 13th 2021, convicted the captain of the ship Asso Ventotto for the crimes provided for and punished according to art. 591 of the Italian Criminal Code (abandonment of minors or vulnerable persons) and art. 1155 of the Italian Naval Code (arbitrary disembarkation and abandonment).

The captain appealed against the decision, contesting the legal qualification of his actions and requesting that the transfer of the shipwrecked people to Libya be considered lawful, as he believed he had fulfilled his international obligations under the SOLAS and SAR conventions. Based upon the above, the captain should have turned exclusively to the Libyan authorities, as they were the only ones deputed to rescue and coordinate a safe harbour on their territory, since the boat was in the so-called Libyan SAR zone. The captain also insisted that he was not aware of a risk to the safety of the shipwrecked people should they return to Libya.

The Naples Court of Appeals in its November 10th 2022 ruling upheld the conviction, also remarking upon some fundamental principles regarding the subject of rescue at sea. The court pointed out that the captain has an obligation to identify people on board (including those who claim to be foreign state officials) and assess the vulnerable conditions of women and children, as well as the eventual need of the shipwrecked persons to ask for international protection and, by virtue of the "position of guarantee" linked to his role, he has the duty to bring them to a safe place.



AMPLIFYING VOICES

“IF WE STAY HERE, WE ARE GOING TO DIE”



The Refugees in Tunisia protesting in front of the UNHCR headquarters in Tunis, March 2023

On April 11th 2023, the refugees and migrants who were carrying out a sit-in in front of the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Tunisian capital Tunis were violently evicted by police forces. For over a month, around 250 people had been holding a peaceful occupation to demand evacuation to a safe country, as their living conditions in Tunisia had become unbearable. Due to the threats posed to the lives of Black migrants and refugees in Tunisia during the prior months (and especially after the racist speech by the Tunisian President end of February), they had turned to the UNHCR to ask for protection.

The UNHCR however failed to support them with even the most basic necessities, such as food, water and shelter, and further escalated the situation by calling the police to evict the protesters' camp. During the eviction, the police attacked people, including children with tear gas, causing serious injuries.

The UNHCR's neglect of refugees and the agency's contribution to the violence faced by people in exile has also been documented in other countries. Refugees in Libya have been denouncing the UNHCR's inaction in the conflict-ridden country for years. Also in Tunisia, the mistreatment of refugees and migrants by the UNHCR has a long history.

The collection of testimonies below, by the Refugees in Tunisia, shows the degradation of their situation and gives more details about the protest sit-in at the UNHCR in Tunis and its violent eviction. The testimonies were collected in April 2023 by activists based in Tunis.

Full text

<https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/04/26/if-we-stay-here-we-are-going-to-die/>

REFUGEES IN TUNISIA

<https://twitter.com/RefugeesTunisia>

“I came in front of UNHCR because I was attacked following the discourse of the president. Some took the chance to rob and attack us. Some Tunisians stole everything in our house in Ariana [a peripheral neighbourhood north of Tunis]. They were more than 50 boys. They were armed with stones and sticks. This is why I came here in front of UNHCR, for protection because my wife is pregnant and needs protection. Our safety is not guaranteed in Tunisia. We cannot stay here.”

[E., explaining why he came to protest in front of the UNHCR, 14.04.23]

“The police attacked everyone, also women and children. They used tear gas. When they threw the tear gas into the crowd, chaos broke out. The first concern of people was to evacuate the place.”

[A, talking about the day when the protest was evicted, 13.04.23]

“When I heard that the police were attacking our camp, I came back to support my wife. But there was so much tear gas when I arrived that I fainted down. When I woke up, I was in the police station. I woke up in a big room with policemen, armed with wooden sticks. The policemen were beating the people in the police station. We were around 150 migrants detained in the police station. [...] We were about 80 people taken to prison. The people who did not want to give fingerprints were beaten. It was so painful. [...]

In the police station, all of us were beaten but some of us more (the ones that were in front during the demonstrations... the people who are more active in the protest). The police knew these people because of the video we posted on social media. The police also used electroshock on us. I was shocked 3 times, this is also why I fainted down. I felt a huge pain in my back. I still feel pain now in my muscles. I was shocked by two policemen at the same time, can you imagine?

My wife [who is 8 months pregnant] fainted down because of tear gas launched by the police in front of the UNHCR and had pain in her stomach. We don't know if the baby is OK or not because when she fainted, she fell on her stomach.”

[E., talking about the day when the protest was evicted, 14.04.23]

“The UNHCR was and is still unwilling to change the situation. We believe it was their plan to evict and disperse the protest. Now for us the goal is to ensure the safety of those who are still imprisoned. And we need to come to a point to show that Tunisia is not safe. We need evacuation. The situation is not balanced. The UNHCR is denying that they are the one who called the police, but they are the ones to be held accountable for what has happened.”

[A., 13.04.23]

“We are dying here, all the world needs to know and help us. Our brothers in prisons are suffering, we are worried for them. We want evacuation to any country, we cannot return back to our country. [...] We don't want to live in fear. [...] People here treat us as animals, the citizens of this country wish bad things to happen to the blacks. I am not saying it is everybody, there are also good people coming here to help us, because they care about us. [...] If we stay here, we are going to die.”

[S., 18.04.23]



Demonstration in front of UNHCR in Tunis, 26th of April 2023

CRIMINALISATION

CONTINUOUS INJUSTICE IN MALTA! THE CASE OF THE *EL HIBLU 3* FOUR YEARS ON

Abdalla, Amara and Kader still face injustice in Malta. Over four years ago, on 28th March 2019, they had arrived on the merchant vessel *El Hiblu 1*, whose crew had rescued over 100 people in distress at sea. The three, now known as the *El Hiblu 3*, helped defuse a volatile situation on board the merchant vessel. When the captain attempted to return the rescued to Libya, they acted as translators and mediators between scared passengers and a scared crew. Four years later the *El Hiblu 3* are still stuck in legal limbo, facing nine preliminary charges, including those of hijacking a vessel, threatening its crew and engaging in terrorist activities.

In order to denounce this incredible injustice and to celebrate the bravery of Abdalla, Amara and Kader, Maltese and international supporters recently gathered in Malta for the fourth anniversary of the *El Hiblu 3*'s arrival to Malta. Over the weekend of 25th-26th March 2023 several events were organised - including a press

conference in front of the law courts, where David Yambio from Refugees in Libya spoke powerfully about the collective struggle against the violence refugees experience in Libya and while moving toward Europe. He called for the trial against the *El Hiblu 3* to be ended: *"One of the three has become a father and he takes responsibility for taking his child to school and providing for her – those are not the actions of a terrorist."* In her speech, President Emeritus Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca also highlighted the cruelty of subjecting three innocent young men to years in legal limbo, stating: *"When they arrived in Malta, two of them were still children, but they were treated like criminals, and thrown into prison. Like any other children, they deserve to live peaceful lives and have their rights protected."*

The events received considerable press coverage in the Maltese press, including in the [Times of Malta](#), [Malta Today](#) and in Maltese-language media [outlets](#).

TIMES OF MALTA

Tuesday, March 28, 2023 | No. 27,479

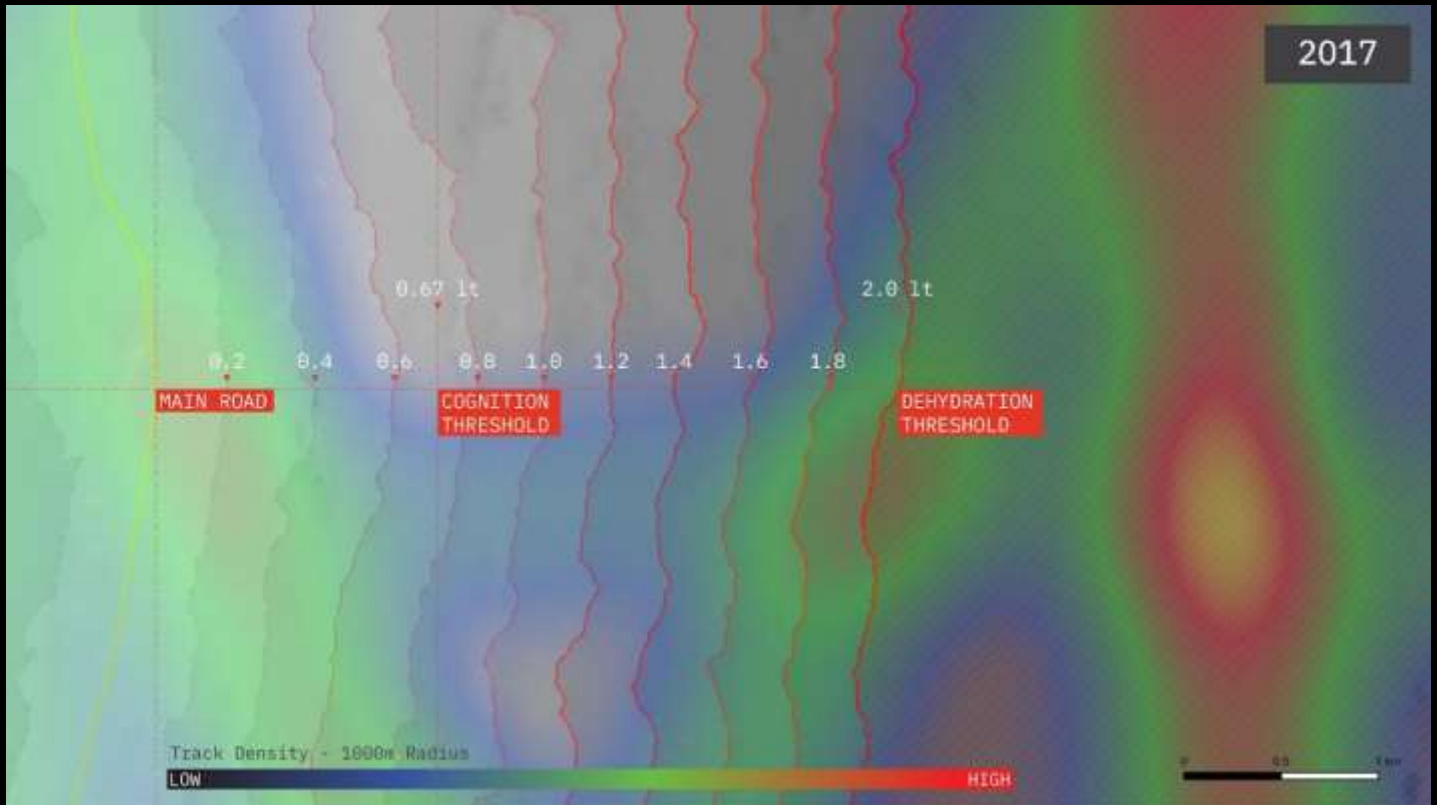
www.timesofmalta.com | €1.20



Former president Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca speaking during a protest in Valletta over the state's failure to withdraw terrorism charges against three young men who have become known as the *El Hiblu 3*. PHOTO: JONATHAN BORG SEE STORY ON PAGE 4

REPORTS

INVISIBLE ROUTES, INCREASED DANGER: THE DEADLY EFFECTS OF BORDER CONTROLS IN NIGER



In May 2015, with the support of the European Union, its agencies and its member states, the Nigerien government adopted Law 2015-36, relating to illicit migrant trafficking to protect migrants from "unscrupulous smugglers." Services for migrants such as transport and accommodation, once openly accepted by the Nigerien authorities and vital for the local economy as well as trans-Saharan mobility, were thus criminalised and subjected to severe penalties, including prison sentences.

These repressive measures and the strengthening of the border devices resulting from them have however neither deterred migrants from transiting via Niger's routes nor protected them from "unscrupulous smugglers" as suggested by the "mission accomplished" narrative broadcast by the Nigerien authorities, their international partners and the media.

On the contrary, according to numerous academic, journalistic, or human rights defence reports, the criminalization of services for migrants and the related control practices have created the need for an underground transport economy, thus exacerbating the dangers migrants face today. To escape controls, carriers take routes through more remote and isolated areas, creating even more dangerous and often fatal situations

for migrants when a vehicle breaks down, gets stuck in sand or is abandoned by carriers for fear of being arrested.

Since the adoption of this law, many actors such as Alarm Phone Sahara (APS) have worked tirelessly to shed light on the ensuing humanitarian disaster for migrants. However, despite these efforts, the actual number of deaths in the Nigerien desert remains unknown. According to the Missing Migrant Project, at least 1092 migrants have died since 2014 trying to cross the Nigerien Sahara. Nevertheless, these figures only represent the tip of the iceberg.

The severe penalties provided for by Law 2015-36 have forced trans-Saharan flows towards very remote areas where incidents can easily go unnoticed, thus making the process of collecting reliable data on the number of deaths even more difficult. In response to this humanitarian crisis resulting from Law 2015-36 and the absence of reliable empirical data, Border Forensics has developed innovative geospatial analysis and remote sensing methodologies. The aim of these new methodologies is to provide empirical documentation on the deadly effects of border control practices in Niger.

These methodologies have been deployed at three key sites located along the Dirkou-Sabha axis: the city of Séguédine, the Madama military fort and the Toummo border post at the border between Niger and Libya. Border Forensics' analyses have focused on water losses and the detection of migrants by defence and security forces. To do this, two geographical models previously applied to the forensic analysis of the militarization of the Sonora desert in the border areas between the United States and Mexico have been used.

The first model, the *viewshed* analysis, uses an algorithm to determine the visibility of various tracks from the main road. Higher values mean greater visibility and, therefore, an increased risk of detection from the main road. The second model incorporates a *cost-distance* analysis, an algorithm that calculates the lowest cumulative cost to cross a given landscape. Using climatic and terrain data, this model can estimate the minimum amount of water a person in distress would need to reach the main route to get help. This model draws on those used in search and rescue operations in the Sonora desert but has been adapted to account for the effort associated with navigating dunes compared to harder surfaces such as bare rock.

Although security dynamics and military activities impacting migration vary from one site to another, the application of these analysis models to the three sites studied reveals clear patterns for each of them. Remote sensing analyses show a significant increase in military and security activities following the adoption and implementation of Law 2015-36.

The report highlights that in the context of increased criminalization of migration (and its assistance) resulting from this law, the presence of checkpoints, police stations, customs and identified military fortifications are all factors that encourage carriers and their passengers to divert their paths. Fearing being arrested when passing through these border and security infrastructures, they take more remote and less visible tracks. Because of the remoteness of these tracks from the main road, carriers and their passengers are at greater risk in case of vehicle breakdown or passenger abandonment, with a high risk of dehydration.

The Border Forensics analysis has explicitly quantified and made visible the risk of dehydration that comes with these new routes. The study involved a comprehensive investigation of the visibility of these new paths and the accompanying dehydration risks, thereby highlighting the inherent dangers.

There is a significant correlation between the increased border controls at the three studied sites and the subsequent decrease in route visibility, according to Border Forensics. These intensified checks have

compelled carriers and their passengers to resort to less visible paths which veer significantly off main routes or areas where one might find assistance.

This shift has made reaching the main route in case of emergencies increasingly challenging, thereby escalating the chances of cognitive impairment, dehydration and heat stroke among migrants. This trend mirrors the one observed at the Mexico-US border, where bolstered border checks have led to heightened risks associated with crossing the Sonora Desert. Such increased scrutiny drives migrants into more remote areas, far from main routes, exacerbating the physiological risks they face.

In parallel with the Sonora Desert, in Northern Niger these risks have dramatically heightened the dangers facing migrants. The analysis conducted by Border Forensics has revealed a clear pattern of border control intensification and alterations in migrant paths that lead deeper into the desert. Survival rates plummet in these areas in the face of recurring incidents such as vehicle malfunctions, abandonments and water shortages.

A more in-depth analysis was undertaken to examine the correlation between the heightened risk of dehydration and dangers for migrants using these alternative paths and the results of the field of vision analysis. The intention was to compare the least-cost path analysis results with the field of vision at each site to understand the causal relationship. The findings showed a significant correlation between the field of vision and sweat loss: the less detectable the route, the higher the risk of death for the people who use it.

Following the adoption of law 2015-36, a noticeable shift in paths towards less visible locations and an increase in sweat loss are evident. Any effort, even minimal, to evade detection, drastically escalates water loss. This trend underscores the clear correlation between the degree of invisibility and the danger level of post-2015 routes. Difficulties in reaching the main route and finding assistance have increased, leading to a higher likelihood of cognitive impairment, dehydration and heat stroke among migrants. Even a slight deviation from the main route significantly elevates the risks of dehydration and death.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.borderforensics.org/investigations/niger-investigation/>

"MORIA 6" - JUSTICE DELAYED IS JUSTICE DENIED

UPDATES ON THE TRIALS AND A NEW INVESTIGATION BY FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE ON THE FIRE IN MORIA

"The appeal trial of four of the Moria 6 originally scheduled to take place on 6 March 2023, was postponed for a year by the Mixed Jury Appeal court of the North Eastern Aegean in Mytilene, Lesvos, until 4 March 2024. During this year, the four young men convicted for the 2020 Moria fires will likely remain in prison, despite the lack of any credible evidence against them, and despite procedural errors which should have led to the annulment of the procedure (...) The postponement of the Moria 6 appeal trial also means that crucial new evidence showing that three of the four were minors when arrested, and raising additional doubts about the evidence that led to the conviction of the four defendants, will not be considered for another year. Among this new evidence is a comprehensive report and video about the circumstances of the Moria fires, including a spatiotemporal reconstruction of the spreading of the fires by the investigative research group, Forensic Architecture. (...)

Coming out of the Court, Vicky Aggelidou, one of the defendants' lawyers from the Legal Centre Lesvos said: *"The three judges of the Appeal court, hidden behind a general strike of workers in Greece, decided to keep holding the four young men hostage in prison for one more year, despite the lack of evidence against them. Once again Greek justice showed its grim, punitive face towards the marginalised. Unfortunately, this comes as no surprise."* (<http://legalcentrelesvos.org>)

RECONSTRUCTION BY FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE

„In the late hours of 8 September 2020, large fires broke out at the migrant camp of Moria, located on the frontier island of Lesvos, Greece. The fires shouldered over several days, displacing thousands of people and reducing the epicenter of the EU's carceral archipelago to ashes. The overcrowded camp, first established in 2013, was host to more than 13,000 people at the time, and was notorious for its precarious and unsafe living conditions—conditions manufactured and maintained for years by Greek and EU policies.

Only a few days after the fire, and before the local Fire Service had concluded their investigation, police arrested six young asylum seekers, five of them minors, accusing them of starting the fire. They later became known as the 'Moria 6'. On the same day that the Moria 6 were arrested, the Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum publicly declared that *"the arsonists of Moria have been detained [and] the safety of everyone is guaranteed"*. The speed of his announcement following the arrests raised serious questions as to whether the trials that followed would be conducted fairly.

Indeed, two subsequent trials that resulted in conviction, one for the two recognised as minors, and the other for the remaining four, were strongly criticised for failing to offer fair proceedings to the accused and described as a 'parody of justice'. Five of the Moria 6 were convicted on the testimony of a single witness, reportedly the leader of a rival ethnic community in the camp. Greek authorities failed to even bring him to court to stand as a witness.

Forensic Architecture was commissioned by the lawyers representing the Moria 6 to map how the fire developed on 8 September 2020 and to interrogate the testimony of the key witness, in advance of the appeal trial of the accused group of four scheduled for March 2023. We sourced and examined hundreds of videos, images, testimonies, and official reports, and conducted a detailed spatio-temporal reconstruction of the spread of the fire through the camp.

Our analysis reveals significant inconsistencies in the testimony of the key witness and casts further doubt on the evidence upon which the judgment of the young asylum seekers was based..."

MORE INFORMATION

<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/fire-in-moria-refugee-camp>



MOBILISATIONS

STATEMENT “TUNISIA IS NEITHER A SAFE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN NOR A PLACE OF SAFETY FOR THOSE RESCUED AT SEA!”



JOINT STATEMENT SIGNED BY 69 CIVIL SEARCH AND RESCUE ORGANIZATIONS AND MIGRANT SOLIDARITY NETWORKS (17 APRIL 2023)

We, the undersigned organisations, issue this statement to remind once again that Tunisia is neither a safe country of origin nor a safe third country. Therefore, it cannot be considered as a place of safety for people rescued at sea. Given the Tunisian ongoing authoritarian state transformation and the extreme violence and persecution of the Black population in Tunisia, as well as of people on the move, political opponents and civil society actors, we urge authorities of the European Union and its member states to withdraw their migration control agreements with the Tunisian authorities and express our solidarity with the people concerned.

Racist attacks against Black people and the crackdown on Tunisian civil society

In the past months, the crackdown against perceived political opponents, civil society, and minoritized populations in Tunisia has intensified. Several Tunisian and international human rights organizations have raised their concerns about the “undermining of judicial independence, the arrests of critics and political opponents, the military trials of civilians, and the ongoing crackdown on freedom of expression and threats to civil society.”

Parallely, the already existing anti-Black racism in Tunisia has escalated, catalysed by the racist and

discriminatory speech against migrants from sub-Saharan Africa by the Tunisian President Kais Saied on February 21, 2023. The discourse led to a worsened situation, especially for those coming from Central and West African countries. A large number of people of the African diaspora in Sfax, Sousse, and the capital Tunis were subjected to acts of violence, found themselves without shelter and food, and were deprived of their right to health and transportation.

Black Africans are not only targeted by pogroms of armed mobs but also by several forms of institutional violence. They are racially profiled, arrested, and arbitrarily detained by security forces. Most of them were forcibly disappeared. For about a month, around 250 people who were rendered homeless, among them children, have organised a sit-in in front of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), demanding their immediate evacuation, as their lives are in danger. On April 11, 2023, the protest was violently evicted by security forces, attacking the crowd with tear gas to disperse them, causing serious injuries. About 80 people were arrested, some report about torture and mistreatment.

These developments occur at a time when Tunisia's socio-economic situation constantly worsens: the unemployment rate is 15 %, and the inflation rate is 10%. The country lacks basic goods, and due to droughts, water usage was just restricted.

Tunisia is not a place of safety!

Several pre-existing elements were already sufficient to contest the safety of Tunisia for its citizens and for considering it not a safe country of origin. Nevertheless, we highlight the increase of expulsions of Tunisian citizens from Italy who do not have access to international protection. After the latest developments, the situation turned dire and dangerous for Black people and foreigners, and it becomes increasingly urgent to state that the safety of Tunisia as a third country looks deeply compromised.

This constellation renders Black migrants and critical voices vulnerable to state repression. They are not safe in Tunisia, and the situation makes them seek an exit from a country that is increasingly dangerous for them. As a consequence, it is unacceptable to disembark in Tunisia those rescued at sea in the attempt to flee the country. According to the Search And Rescue (SAR) Convention, a rescue is defined as "an operation to retrieve persons in distress, provide for their initial medical or other needs, and deliver them to a place of safety". In the resolution MSC 167(78) of the International Maritime Organization, a place of safety is further defined as "a place where the survivors' safety of life is no longer threatened and where their basic human needs (such as food, shelter, and medical needs) can be met."

Tunisia has no national asylum system, and the people rescued at sea, whether Tunisians or non-Tunisians, are at high risk of being subjected to human rights violations, detention, and violent refoulements. Disembarkation of those shipwrecked and rescued at sea in Tunisia violates international human rights and maritime law.

Stop Europe's complicity in border deaths

For more than a decade, the EU and its member states have been politically supporting, funding, and equipping the Tunisian state in controlling its borders and containing migration toward Europe. The aim is clear: no one should reach the EU at all costs.

They are doing so by means of several agreements for the "joint management of migration", border control, and the repatriation of citizens. Between 2016 and 2020, more than 37 million Euros from the EU Trust Fund for Africa were granted to Tunisia for the "management of

migration flows and borders". More millions of Euros are to come. Further, the EU supports through "police training, the provision of equipment for data collection and management, technical support, equipment and maintenance of vessels for coastal patrolling and other tools for tracking and monitoring movements." A change in European policies is not in sight. Only in November 2022, in its recent Action Plan for the Central Mediterranean, the European Commission mentioned its aim to "strengthen capacities of Tunisia [...] to prevent irregular departures [and] support more effective border and migration management."

In this way, the EU is supporting a Tunisian actor whose human rights violations against people on the move are well documented: the Tunisian Coast Guard. The number of interceptions and pullbacks by the Tunisian Coast Guard to Tunisia has increased enormously in recent years. In the first quarter of 2023 alone, 14,963 people were prevented from leaving Tunisia by sea and were violently towed back against their will on behalf of the EU.

Already in December 2022, more than fifty associations denounced the violence of the Tunisian Coast Guard: "Beating people with sticks, firing shots in the air or in the direction of the engine, knife attacks, dangerous manoeuvres to attempt to sink boats, demanding money in exchange for rescue...". These attacks have accelerated in recent months, targeting both Tunisian and non-Tunisian migrants. In addition, it has recently been documented that the Tunisian Coast Guard steals the engines of boats trying to escape the country, leaving people on board adrift while watching, which has led to preventable deaths at sea.

The undersigned organisations recall that Tunisia is not a so-called safe country of origin for Tunisian citizens. Furthermore, it is not a place of safety for people from sub-Saharan Africa, Tunisians, and other foreigners transiting through this country. We ask the authorities of the European Union and its member states to stop their cooperation with Tunisian authorities on migration control. We also ask to stop their financial and technical support to the Tunisian Coast Guard, and provide safe routes for all.

The statement can be found with footnotes and the list of signatories here:

<https://sea-watch.org/en/tunisia-is-neither-a-safe-country/>

FROM TRIPOLI TO BRUXELLES

AMPLIFY THE VOICES OF REFUGEES IN LIBYA! CALL FOR A DEMONSTRATION IN BRUSSELS ON 1ST OF JULY 2023

Brussels is at the centre of European decision-making, with the headquarters of EU-Council, the EU-Commission and its parliament. It is also the heart of EU border politics and the site of UNHCR, IOM and Frontex offices, which are involved in migration and refugee “management”. Here, in this capital, we can find the main actors who are responsible for the endless suffering and death at the borders of Europe.

We are calling for a mobilization in Brussels at the same week as EU leaders meet for their EU-council-summit on 29th and 30th of June, in order to confront these institutions and agencies with the voices and demands of refugees who have survived or are still experiencing their inhuman border policy.

Today thousands of people are stranded, exploited, imprisoned, and killed in Libya. European money has outsourced its control of its borders, with ongoing complicity of militias and with the UNHCR passively watching. Similar refugee rights violations happen in other North African countries, particularly in Tunisia, where people with a sub-Saharan background have been confronted, since February 2023, with a wave of racist intimidation, attacks, and repression.

With our demonstration on Saturday, 1st of July in Brussels, we will bring the protest and demands to the UNHCR, the IOM and Frontex and to the European Parliament.

Refugees in Libya is a self-organized protest movement which was formed in response to the violent crackdown and arrests of 5000 refugees and migrants living in the Gargaresh neighbourhood of Tripoli on 1 October 2021.

Afterwards, thousands of refugees started a sit-in for more than 100 days in front of the UNHCR office in Tripoli: an historical act of self-organisation under the harshest conditions.

Solidarity with Refugees in Libya is an alliance of mainly Europe-based individuals and groups, working closely with Refugees in Libya to support and strengthen their demands in Europe and beyond. As the UNFAIR campaign, we have organised 2 days of protest in Geneva in December 2022, where we held a press conference in front of the head office of

UNHCR and marched through Geneva in protest of UNHCR’s UNFAIR treatment of refugees in Libya.

The main demands for the Brussels protests are:

- Evacuation of Refugees from Libya and Tunisia to safe countries;
- Freedom and evacuation of the 250 refugees, who are still imprisoned in Ain Zara detention camp in Libya since the mass protests in 2021;
- Fair treatment by UNHCR for all refugees in Libya and other North African countries;
- Put an end to the financing of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and detention camps by the EU and European countries;
- Justice for those who have been murdered, tortured or arbitrarily detained;
- Libya should sign the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention;
- Recognition of „Refugees in Libya“ as an organisation to represent these demands and to have regular talks with UNHCR and other institutions.

The demonstration will start at 14:00 CEST in Brussels, probably close to the UNHCR office. A more detailed place and route will be published soon.



MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/call-to-bruxelles>
<http://unfairagency.org/>

WE KINDLY REQUEST YOU TO STOP KILLING

JOIN OUR NON-STOP PERFORMANCE IN BRUSSELS!



We, the Alarm Phone Creative-Action-Group, invite you to our first action.

“We kindly request you to stop killing” is an attempt to deal with the systemic indifference we face in matters of life and death on the Mediterranean Sea. Every year since 2014, the Alarmphone sends out thousands of SOS-Emails alerting authorities to boats in distress at sea. Thousands of standardized words, numbers and GPS-Coordinates, reporting urgent situations of distress and the too long wait for interventions. Thousands of repeated kind requests for rescue, many of them unanswered.

Oftentimes when we alert authorities about a boat in distress and send updates every hour, they don't react or later claim not to have known. Responsibility is outsourced to other countries, made ambiguous between different agencies or denied altogether. Sometimes we ask the same people who violently and illegally carry out systematic pushbacks to assist a boat in distress because there is nothing else we can do.

We witness those who denounce a person's right to claim asylum as “illegal immigration” break international maritime laws on a daily basis. In a space that is so incredibly surveilled, authorities turn a blind eye at their convenience and information is guarded with silence. We often don't know when or if at all a boat will be sent to the people in distress at

sea. All we know is that now, in this moment, in that location, there are so and so many people for whom everything is at stake.

When someone calls us from a boat in the hope that on the other side of the line a human will answer and not a machine, we take each unique voice and convert it into a standardized bureaucratic language so authorities might pay attention. We transform people into numbers, and lives into coordinates. We strip away the anguish, the fear, the rage, the hope until we become bureaucrats ourselves. We log each call and politely state our cause, one email at a time, 4325 emails a year.

But we are not as kind and polite as it may sound! We are not as patient as it might seem when it goes again: “Dear officer on duty...”.

We are angry! We are tired! We are desperate! We want answers! We will keep on fighting for the end of border violence and freedom of movement for all!

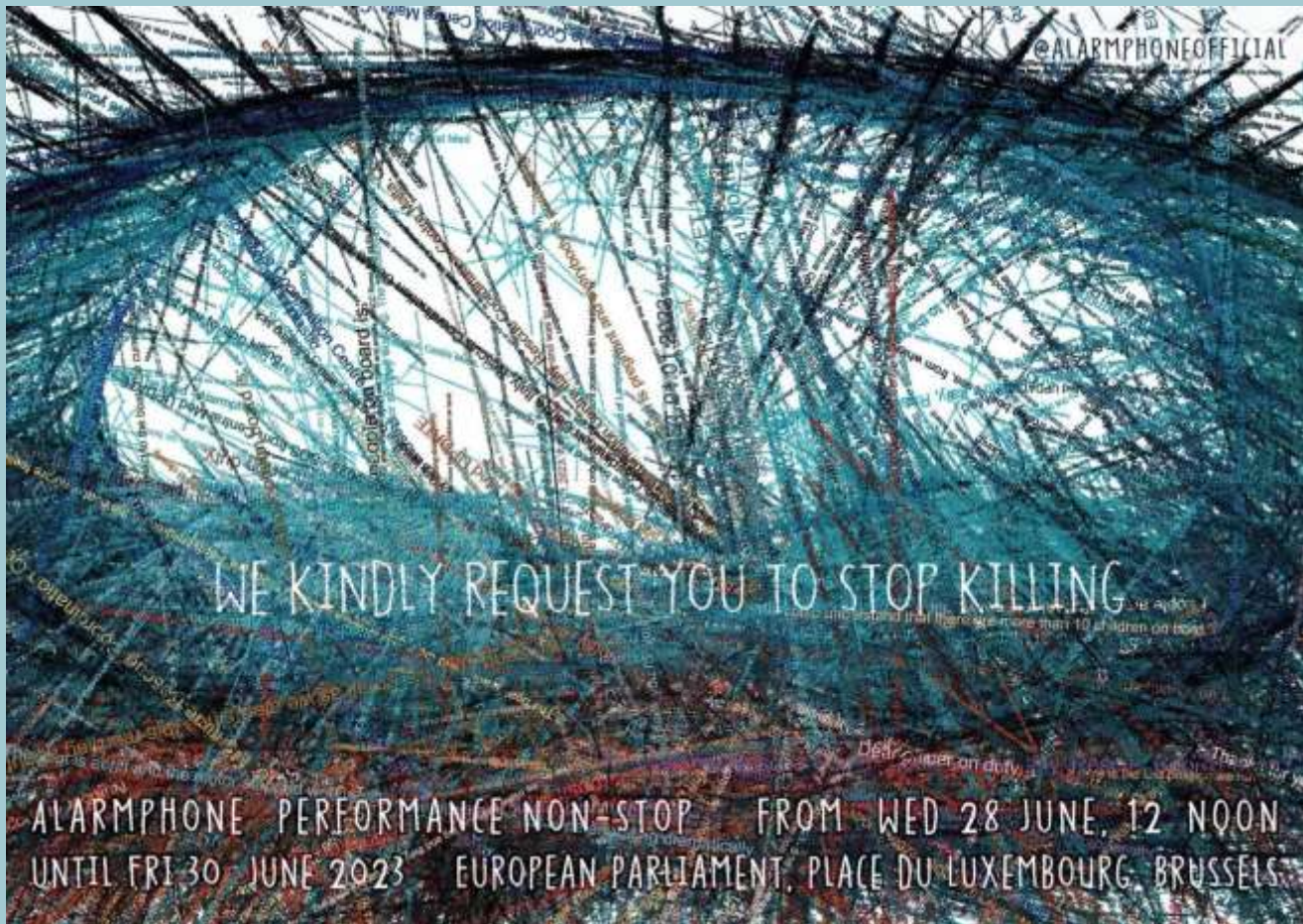
We will read aloud all the Emails that the Alarmphone has written to authorities from January first and the first case of 2023 until the day of the read-in at the end of June. In front of the EU Parliament - 300 km from where human rights were invented, 600 km from where the convention on the status of refugees was signed, right where decisions are made that deny freedom of movement to millions, that send thousands back against their will, that install surveillance and security systems, that send drones and built barbed-wire fences, that claim to protect lives and rights but in reality, kill and violate their own laws.

We will read these Emails at the place where the repetitive, deadly spectacle of bureaucracy and foreclosure policies that keep people waiting in distress at sea is made.

This is where we won't stop reading. Day and night. This is where we kindly request to stop killing!

Our read-in will be accompanied and interrupted by a real time alarm - the first public appearance of the Alarmbox that reports about current and ongoing distress situations in the Mediterranean.

Join our action or support us by reaching out at ap-read-in@riseup.net



We are angry!

We are tired!

We are desperate! We want answers!

**We will keep on fighting for the end of border
violence and freedom of movement for all!**



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