

JOINT STATEMENT

Yet another tragedy of the coast of Zarzis: the search for truth and justice

20 October 2022

The Mediterranean Sea has returned the bodies of the victims of the shipwreck of a boat which left from Zarzis, in the South of Tunisia, in mid-September. The families of the citizens of the city demand dignity for all, practical engagement from the authorities in the search for the remaining bodies missing at sea and for justice to be done.

On 21 September, two women, a baby of one year and two months and 15 other people, the oldest of whom was a bit more than 25 years, embarked from the coast of Zarzis. Having no news of them, two days after their departure the families alerted the Tunisian, Italian and Maltese authorities, as well as the civil search and rescue fleet. As opposed to the passivity of the national authorities in response to the demands of the inhabitants of Zarzis to begin search and rescue operations, the Association of Fishermen undertook four autonomous search operations.

On 2 October, the shipwreck was confirmed. The body of a woman, Malek, was washed up on the beach of Djerba. The photos of other corpses which had arrived along the Tunisian coast began to be shared. During this time, some of the bodies would be buried in the Zarzis Cemetery without the authorities having first undertaken DNA tests. On 12 October, the fears of the family of one of the missing, Aymen, were confirmed. The family thought that they had recognised their loved one thanks to the clothes that he was wearing. The identification was confirmed by DNA test carried out after his body was exhumed.

On that day, seven bodies were identified. Nevertheless, the confirmation of the shipwreck is unfortunately not the last stage for the families in this tragedy. When the bodies were recovered, identification by DNA testing should have been mandated, so that the families could have given their loved ones a dignified burial.

After several days, the city of Zarzis, was shaken by the protests of the families, the high schools and associations who demanded the truth about the disappearance of the bodies of their fellow citizens and who pointed out the unwritten law, which has been in force for decades -- and not only in Tunisia, that bodies found at sea are buried without DNA identification. However, in our judgement, the angry demonstrations and the speaking out by the witnesses is a bigger denunciation of the politics of externalisation which, in criminalising these routes, makes them more and more dangerous and deadly.



The tragedy which cost the lives of these 18 people is not an isolated case. In the racialised geography of the Europe of today, more and more people lose their life. The number of victims and people who have disappeared off the Tunisian coast in 2022 is at least 544. Recently, following a shipwreck off Teboulba in the Monastir government, other bodies were fished out of the sea. These tragedies shine a light on the racist and militarised network of border control apparatuses, visa regimes and the subordinate value placed on human lives

Beset by this tragedy which touches each and every one of us, the undersigned organisations:

- **Express their indefatigable solidarity with all of the families, comrades friends and communities, rent by pain and who should be treated in a dignified manner.**
- **Thank the fishermen who, once again, showed their solidarity and their commitment to search and rescue at sea.**
- **Denounce the opacity and passivity of the Tunisian authorities who will not intervene to assist people in distress and who do not send out search and rescue organisation, and demand the opening of an enquiry before the courts in order to establish the truth about what happened.**
- **Call for freedom of movement and the right to cross borders to be made an integral part of the rights of humans and consider that the repeated dramas linked to irregular migration are the result of the absence of regular routes into the countries of the European Union.**

Press contact



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List of signatories :

- **A Buon Diritto ONLUS**
- **ActionAid Italia**
- **Association BEITY**
- **Association Citoyenneté et Libertés**
- **Association d'Aides et Assistances aux Migrants**
- **Association des Juristes de Sfax**
- **Association des Tunisiens en France**
- **Association des Volontaires de Bouarada**
- **Association Enfants de la lune de Médenine**



- **Association Esmâani**
- **Association Humanitaires de Médenine**
- **Association Ifriqiya**
- **Association Intersection pour les droits et les libertés**
- **Association la Voix de l'Enfant Rural**
- **Association MADA pour la citoyenneté et le développement**
- **Association NESS pour la prévention combinée**
- **Association Petit Théâtre**
- **Association pour le Développement Durable et la Coopération Internationale de Zarzis**
- **Association pour le Leadership et le Développement en Afrique**
- **Association Tunisienne de défense des libertés individuelles**
- **Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates**
- **Association Tunisienne de l'Action Culturelle**
- **Association Tunisienne de Soutien des Minorités**
- **Associazione Cledu**
- **Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione**
- **Aswat Nissa**
- **Avocats Sans Frontières Tunisie**
- **Borderline Sicilia ONLUS**
- **Carovane Migranti – Italia**
- **CCFD-Terre Solidaire**
- **Coalition Tunisienne contre la Peine de mort**
- **Coalition Tunisienne pour la Dignité et la Réhabilitation**
- **Comité pour le Respect des Libertés et de Droits de l'homme en Tunisie**
- **EuroMed Rights**
- **Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux**
- **Groupe Tawhida Ben Cheikh**
- **Institut Tunisien pour la réhabilitation – Nebras**
- **International Alert**
- **Ligue tunisienne pour la défense des Droits de l'Homme**
- **Mai più Lager - No ai CPR**
- **Maison Couss & Co Editions**
- **Initiative Mawjoudin pour l'égalité**
- **Mediterranea Saving Humans**



- **Mediterranean Hope**
- **Mem.Med – Mémoire Méditerranée**
- **Mountada Ettajdid, Tunis**
- **Ongi Etorri Errefuxiatuak - Espagne, Pais Vasco**
- **Organisation Contre la Torture en Tunisie**
- **Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture**
- **Perspectives El 3amel Ettounsi**
- **Psychologues du Monde-Tunisie**
- **Réseau Migreurop**
- **Réseau Tunisien pour la Justice Transitionnelle**
- **Rete Antirazzista Catanese**
- **Tunisia Tomorrow**
- **Un Ponte Per**
- **Union des Diplômés Chômeurs**
- **Watch The Med - Alarm Phone**
- **We Love Sousse**