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VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, AND MEMORIES **BETWEEN THE TWO SHORES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN**

Mem.Med Report

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INDICE

DYING FROM VIOLENCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN 2

The Expansion and Intensification of Outsourcing Practices 2

The New Tunisian SRR 2

Agreement between Italy and Albania 3

The Intensification of Border Criminalization 5

Criminalization and Persecution of Sea Rescue Efforts 5

Criminalization of Border Crossing 5

SUPPORTING FAMILIES WHO RESIST OBLIVION 8

Aissatou Aisha Barry 9

11 Bodies off the Libyan Coast and the Search for Eritrean Families 11

Ibne Ishtiaq Hassan and the 10 bodies of Bangladeshi citizens 13

Ijaz Firas 15

Youssef Kafafy 16

Abulrahman Alheloas 17

The Roccella Jonica Massacre 19

CONCLUSION 21

DYING FROM VIOLENCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

During the summer months of 2024, the Mediterranean Sea continued to witness violence against people on the move, repression targeting those who show solidarity with them, and widespread violations of fundamental rights. This report focuses specifically on events that occurred along the Central Mediterranean route from June to September 2024.

To better understand the context, we will first examine the political developments that defined the summer, then we will explore specific cases followed by the Mem.Med association. These cases involve the support provided to the families of the missing or deceased in their fight for truth and justice.

The Expansion and Intensification of Outsourcing Practices

The New Tunisian SRR

The growing effort to turn Europe into an increasingly impenetrable fortress is evident in the ongoing cooperation between EU member states and Mediterranean countries, which are becoming ever more dangerous for people on the move.



A key example of this is the official establishment in June of the **Tunisian Search and Rescue Region (SRR)**, which makes the Tunisian Coast Guard responsible for coordinating the search and rescue activities of various actors, including NGOs, operating in international waters¹.

This new SRR extends from the area near Western Sicily to the south of Sardinia, significantly expanding the reach of the Tunisian Coast Guard. The Tunisian SRR adds to the Libyan SRR, created in 2018, which has been the site of numerous human rights violations and extreme violence against migrants operated by the Libyan Coast Guard².

¹ <https://sosmediterranea.it/2024/07/29/zona-ricerca-e-soccorso-in-tunisia-urgente-affrontare-le-questioni-umanitarie/>

² <https://www.meltingpot.org/2024/07/mediterranea-denuncia-la-guardia-costiera-libica-mentre-e-in-corso-il-vertice-a-tripoli/>

This development raises serious concerns, as many human rights organisations have pointed out³.

In Tunisia, migrants and the civil society activists who support them have been subjected to intense repression. Since President Kais Saied's racist speech on February 6, 2023, xenophobic and racist violence has surged, with its narrative being trivialised: police raids on migrant communities, arbitrary arrests, pushbacks, mass deportations to the desert, and widespread abuse, not only by police but also by civilians, have become everyday occurrences⁴. Despite this, Libya and Tunisia **are still considered "safe ports,"** even though Italy continues to fund their governments and send resources such as ships and border control equipment to strengthen the coast guards' ability to patrol territorial waters and intercept migrant boats, all while ignoring international law. This strategy is further backed by **significant financial support from the European Union.**

Through dedicated security and defence programs, funds have been allocated to both the Tunisian Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior to bolster the National Guard and police forces, providing military equipment to enhance control over both land and maritime borders. However, several NGOs, including Alarm Phone and IRPI Media, have documented **serious human rights violations by the Tunisian National Guard**, such as abuse of migrants, forced pushbacks, and deportations to the desert. For instance, Alarm Phone's *Interrupted Sea* report⁵ exposes the direct involvement of both Tunisian and Libyan authorities in violent interception and detention operations against migrants, operations funded by European money. This context shows how the outsourcing of European borders not only fuels inhumane practices but also effectively legitimises and finances the ongoing violations of the basic rights of people on the move.

Agreement between Italy and Albania

In February 2024, the Italian Senate approved the ratification and implementation law for the **Italy-Albania protocol**⁶. This protocol, signed by President Meloni and her Albanian counterpart, Edi Rama, establishes the free use of certain areas of the Albanian territory for the activation of a centre dedicated to processing the entry, identification, and legal status of arriving individuals. The protocol includes a hotspot in Shënjë, **a detention facility in Gjader for conducting border procedures**, as well as a **Center for Repatriation (CPR)** where individuals deemed ineligible for entry or stay in Italy can be detained. Finally, it also includes a penitentiary facility.

The protocol is based on the fact that, although these structures are located on Albanian soil, they will be managed and fall under Italian jurisdiction.

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/tunisia-repressive-crackdown-on-civil-society-organizations-following-months-of-escalating-violence-against-migrants-and-refugees/>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/sep/19/italy-migrant-reduction-investigation-rape-killing-tunisia-eu-money-keir-starmer-security-forces-smugglers>

⁵ <https://alarmphone.org/it/2024/06/20/mare-interrotto/>

⁶ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/provvedimento/protocollo-italia-albania-in-materia-migratoria.html>



However, this extraterritorial management of migrant populations has raised deep concerns among human rights organisations, as it represents a significant regression in the protection and guarantee of the rights of people on the move. The implementation of the protocol means that **detention will be automatic and generalised as the only option for individuals, from transfer to possible repatriation**, raising serious concerns about the risk that people with specific needs may be subjected to this measure. Furthermore, major issues surround migrants' access to legal assistance, calling into question their right to defence and the right to asylum⁷.

These measures raise doubts about the compatibility of the protocol with national laws, and especially with international laws. In this regard, on **October 18, 2024, the Rome Court** did not validate the detention of 12 people deported on October 12, 2024, from countries classified as safe origins (Egypt and Bangladesh)⁸, ruling their stay in Albania as unlawful. Again, on **November 11, 2024**, the Rome Court, for the same reasons, suspended the validation of the detention of seven Egyptian and Bangladeshi asylum seekers deported to the detention centre in Albania on November 8, 2024. While Ursula Von Der Leyen has stated that the list of safe countries will be reviewed in the coming months⁹, the Italy-Albania protocol appears to be a **deportation machine** that the Meloni government is determined to operate with **total disregard for the fundamental** rights of people involved in the process.

Additionally, the government approved the “**Security Bill**” on September 18, 2024, continuing the path of the D.L. 20/2023 — shamefully called the “Cutro Decree”—which, in addition to a series of severe attacks on the right to dissent and freedom of expression, introduces **harsher security measures** in prisons and detention facilities for holding migrants. Passive resistance will be punished with years of imprisonment.

7 <https://www.meltingpot.org/2024/02/il-protocollo-italia-albania-e-legge-tra-nuovi-vuoti-normativi-e-vecchie-violazioni-di-diritti/#easy-footnote-bottom-1-500058>

8 <https://effimera.org/migranti-il-testo-integrale-del-decreto-del-tribunale-di-roma-non-convalida-al-trasferimento-in-albania/>

9 https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/rubriche/altrenews/2024/10/15/von-der-leyen-ai-leader-ue-lavorare-sugli-hub-per-i-migranti-come_fld16ac3-66e1-4314-bab8-13577e46efc8.html



The Intensification of Border Criminalization

Criminalization and Persecution of Sea Rescue Efforts

In addition to outsourcing border controls, the criminalization of rescue ships and people on the move continues to play a central role in the border control regime. As observed in the summer months, **the Italian government increasingly prevents rescue ships from carrying out their life-saving work** by assigning distant ports for disembarkation, far from the positions of the NGOs. For example, on July 9, 2024, the rescue ship Ocean Viking, with over 250 people on board, was assigned the port of

Marina di Carrara, over 1,000 km away from its location¹⁰. The same happened to the German-flagged ship of SOS Humanity, which was directed to the port of Ortona, 1,200 km away¹¹.

Law 50/2023 continues to have its repressive effects on the rescue ships operating in the Mediterranean. Fines and administrative detentions are frequently imposed, as was the case with the Geo Barents ship of Médecins Sans Frontières, which was detained four times in recent months for violating the provisions of the decree¹². With these decisions, the Italian authorities allow deadly gaps in the Central Mediterranean, where migrants are exposed to violent pushbacks by the Libyan and Tunisian Coast Guards.

Criminalization of Border Crossing

Alongside the criminalization of rescue ships, Article 12 of the Consolidated Immigration Law, which defines the "crime of aiding illegal immigration," continues to exemplify Italy's criminalising, securitarian, and discriminatory approach towards migrants¹³.

This summer, the trial against **Maysoon Majidi**, an Iranian activist, artist, and filmmaker who is part of the **Jin Jiyān Azadi** movement, drew particular attention. She fled her country due to the Iranian regime's oppression, crossed the sea, and upon arriving in Italy was accused of being the "smuggler" of the boat she travelled on with 77 others, arriving at the coast of Crotone on December 31, 2023.

¹⁰ <https://www.sosmediterranea.ch/actualites/recap-09-10-07-2024-261-personnes-ont-ete-secourues-par-locean-viking>

¹¹ https://www.ansa.it/ansamed/it/notizie/rubriche/cronaca/2024/01/18/assegnato-il-porto-di-ortona-alla-humanity-1-con-126-migranti_4da8afe0-3879-4435-b611-3b10aa832b04.html

¹² https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2024/09/24/nuevo-fermo-per-la-geo-barents-stop-di-60-giorni_e7cf5305-48b1-437c-9e9c-46b282b4246a.html

Her story mirrors that of **Marjan Jalali**, another Iranian asylum seeker who arrived in Italy in October 2023 with her son and others. These attacks not only highlight the harshness and violence the state inflicts on those crossing the Mediterranean, but also the ongoing criminalization efforts.

In response to the abuses she faced, Maysoon Majidi went on a hunger strike, protesting against the injustices inflicted by the Italian State¹⁴. In court, Maysoon defended herself, raising her voice to explain the absurdity and groundlessness of the charges against her.

As of the latest court hearing in Crotona, Maysoon was released and will not have to wait for her trial in prison, though her case is still ongoing and will be concluded on November 27, 2024. Attention must remain high, especially since **Marjan Jalali is still under house arrest**, and her trial continues at the Court of Locri, where she faces the additional stigma of not conforming to the stereotype of the "good mother."

Majidi and Jalali are not the only ones facing arbitrary trials: the charge of smuggling, which targets hundreds of men and women¹⁵, is an integral part of the criminalization of people on the move, despite the fact that it is now publicly known that human traffickers do not travel with the migrants themselves but rather wear the uniforms of the Libyan Coast Guard. At the end of the summer, the killing of **Abdurahman al-Milan, also known as Bija, an arms and human trafficking member of the Libyan Coast Guard** and sought by Interpol, caused a stir.



Killed in Libya, he had recently been spotted aboard an Italian patrol boat¹⁶ and had visited Italy in 2017, attending a summit organised by Italian Ministries at the CARA of Mineo (CT)¹⁷. Officially financing Coast Guards whose members are active in human trafficking is an integral part of Italy and Europe's management of human mobility. Combined with the vile tactic of criminalising people on the move, including through the "smuggling" crime, this practice becomes a strategy for the murderous policies enacted by the Italian State and the EU.

The criminalization of alleged smugglers is closely linked to policies that seek to erase the visibility of deaths at sea: the victims of borders are often only considered by authorities in investigative and judicial stages to be used as instruments in the attack on people on the move¹⁸. In this way, these deaths are further insulted,

¹³ Si veda il progetto [Captain Support](#).

¹⁴ Per saperne di più invitiamo ad ascoltare l'emissione radiofonica di Radio Alqantara al seguente link: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/56jMYjkGU34D1B6V86nYeL?si=Bx7AaxTKS9y0ljv73EbZgg&t=949>

¹⁵ Da ultimo Ufuk Akturk, imputato insieme a Maysoon Majidi <https://www.crotonenews.com/cronaca/condannato-a-otto-anni-e-quattro-mesi-akturk-ufuk-imputato-insieme-a-maysoon/>

¹⁶ <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/ucciso-in-libia-il-comandante-trafficante-bija-custode-dei-segreti-con-italia-ed-europa>

¹⁷ <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/dalla-libia-al-mineo-negoziato-boss-libico>

¹⁸ <https://civilmrcc.eu/>

as they are turned into reasons to punish those who drove the boats, thereby absolving the real perpetrators of these crimes.

All of this is happening in an increased context of **militarization and technological surveillance of ruthless borders**: the European agency **Frontex** will see its budget increase in the next four years and is involved in more and more pushbacks and violence against migrants and those who support them. Using increasingly precise tools, Frontex employs technology to meticulously monitor the borders and prevent any crossing, even when it witnesses the dangerous conditions in which the vessels attempting the crossing find themselves. On April 24, 2024, the Court of Luxembourg ruled that Frontex had hidden over 100 photos proving its involvement in human rights violations in the Mediterranean¹⁹.

This technologization, combined with the intensification of border control outsourcing and the increasing criminalization of migrants, shows how European governments are waging an ever more **brutal ideological war against the populations moving from the southern Mediterranean**. In Italy, as seen above, we are witnessing the outright hollowing out of the right to asylum: in fact, the Italy-Albania protocol legally authorises the prevention of people from reaching the territory of the European Union. The political will to inhumanely and unscrupulously erase and invisibilize migrant populations is becoming less and less hidden.

¹⁹ <https://sea-watch.org/it/sentenza-del-tribunale-dellunione-europa-frontex-ha-nascosto-ingiustamente-immagini-e-documenti/>

SUPPORTING FAMILIES WHO RESIST OBLIVION



According to estimates from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, the number of arrivals in 2024 has decreased compared to 2023²⁰. Nevertheless, **the Central Mediterranean route remains one of the deadliest**²¹, with Tunisian and Libyan coastguards operating unchecked, completely disregarding international law. Mem.Med actively fights to remind us that these individuals have rights. By standing alongside families against invisibilization, **we emphasise that the narrative of racist and violent states is not the only one.**

During the summer of 2024, Mem.Med workers dealt with multiple cases involving a total of **25 families from June to September**. In the following pages, we will present the most recent cases followed by Mem.Med. The detailed stories of these individuals, with testimonies from their families who are fighting for truth and justice regarding these deaths, can be found in the "Memories" section of Mem.Med's website. All stories were collected by Mem.Med workers along with the families, friends, and communities, and the publication was done with their consent.

On these pages, we specifically want to recount — a year and a half after the Steccato di Cutro massacre — **the massacre of Roccella Ionica**, which occurred on the night between June 16 and 17, where at least 35 people lost their lives: a shipwreck with numerous fatalities that was silenced and made invisible. We will also recall other **incidents of violence at sea** and at borders that have not emerged in the media or politically but are just as severe because they led to the deaths of dozens of people this summer. Their families have been fighting for months to restore a name to these individuals and seek justice.

²⁰ <https://alarmphone.org/it/2024/06/20/mare-interrotto/>

²¹ <https://sosmediterranee.fr/route-migratoire-mediterranee-centrale/>

Mem.Med has received reports not only from the families themselves but also from **rescue ships of NGOs** conducting search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean: during the summer of 2024, these organisations repeatedly recovered the bodies of individuals who died during the crossing. Starting from these reports and within the **CMRCC²² network**, we worked to reconstruct their stories, identities, and names with the families.

As we close this report, we are supporting the **Syrian families** of the individuals involved in the **shipwreck of September 3-4, 2024, off the coast of Lampedusa²³**. According to reconstructions, 21 people went missing, including 3 children.

Together with mothers and sisters, we are gathering data and information about their missing loved ones to support them in the identification of the 7 bodies that arrived in Lampedusa, which are unfortunately in an advanced state of decomposition, making visual identification extremely difficult. DNA identification procedures are also complex, as the families are in Syria, and the national and international bodies responsible for forensic practices often fail to respond to requests from relatives.

In addition to the search for truth, there is also the search for justice: the accusation made by the NGO Sea Watch — which issued three alerts to authorities after spotting the boat that later sank — and by other civil society actors working on the case is that **the Italian and Maltese governments delayed rescue²⁴ efforts and therefore have responsibilities in the deaths of these 21 people.**



Aissatou Aisha Barry

Aissatou Aisha Barry, a 23-year-old Guinean woman, embarked on the Mediterranean route in February 2023, trying to reach Italy. She was rescued at sea during a rescue operation and was disembarked in Lampedusa in the night between February 19 and 20, 2023. She arrived — as was learned later — in a coma, on a boat that departed from Sfax, Tunisia, carrying 45 people. Aissatou Aisha was then transferred to a local health centre along with another pregnant woman.

²² <https://civilmrcc.eu/>

²³ <https://tg24.sky.it/cronaca/2024/09/04/lampedusa-barca-migranti-capovolta-dispersi>

²⁴ <https://ilmanifesto.it/lesposto-di-sea-watch-fu-naufragio-colposo>

From there, her traces were lost neither the pregnant woman, who was later moved to the Lampedusa hotspot, nor Aissatou's companion, Mohammed, who had arrived with her, were informed of her condition. After a while, Mohammed contacted some staff at the hotspot, who told him that Aissatou had died, but he was not allowed to see the body or make an identification.

Through Mohammed's testimony, more details about Aissatou Aisha's physical characteristics were gathered, and with this information, authorities were contacted. They informally declared that the young Guinean woman had been found in critical condition at sea and had died during transport to Lampedusa.

Aissatou's sister, Adama Barry, from Guinea, learned about what had happened and sought support to find her sister, identify her, and bring her home. She got in touch with researcher Filippo Furri, who connected her with our association, which began the legal support process for the Barry family.

Together, we tried to access information about the disembarkation that night to track the movement of the body, which was believed to belong to Aissatou Aisha Barry. We submitted a missing persons report and a request for identification to the Agrigento Prosecutor's Office. We learned that the body had been informally identified in Lampedusa as "Aisha Barry" based on testimony from survivors of the journey. However, Aisha was a nickname for Aissatou, not her official registered name, which hindered the identification

process.

While we were still awaiting the authorities' response, we learned that Aissatou Aisha's body had been buried in Montevago, a town in the Agrigento area, about a month after it was recovered, even though the family had already requested identification and repatriation.

The bureaucratic process to restore Aissatou Barry's real name and allow her family to bring her home has been long and complex, involving embassies, police forensics, civil courts, and the prosecutor's office. In this process, the involvement of the Lampedusa and Montevago municipalities was key, as they helped reconstruct and confirm the movements of the body.

Finally, in July 2024, the request to correct the name was approved through identification of the body using photographic material released by the Prosecutor's Office. The lawyer from Mem.Med, who represents Adama Barry's interests, was tasked with conducting this identification remotely, as the family could not physically travel to Italy.

In an afternoon video call connecting Italy to Guinea, Adama finally saw her sister's face in a photo taken of the body when Aissatou was already deceased. From the first photo, Adama had no doubt it was her. Aissatou had a distinctive gap in her teeth, which had been reported to the authorities from the start and served as a crucial identifier. The pain of having to identify her sister in such a violent way was partly alleviated by the fact that she had finally found her and could formally recognize her.

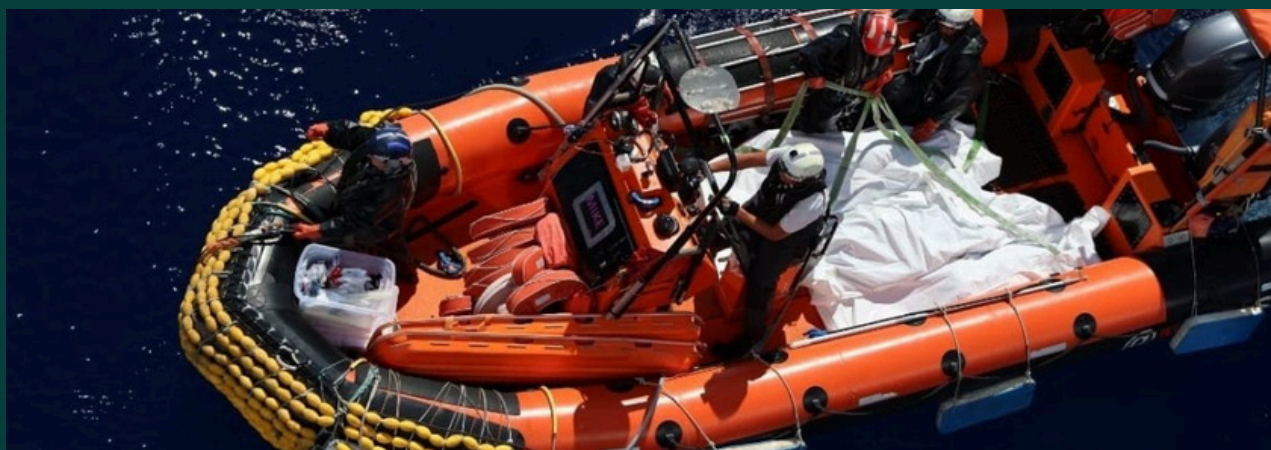
24 <https://ilmanifesto.it/esposto-di-sea-watch-fu-naufragio-colposo>

Currently, the procedures to correct Aissatou's burial details are ongoing. Once this phase is completed,

at the request of Adama and the Barry family, the request to exhume the body will be made so that it can be repatriated to Guinea.

Aïcha was a young woman full of dreams, ambitious and determined (...). From a young age, she would say: "Mama, one day I'll lift you out of all this poverty." Aïcha is gone, leaving a great void behind her (...). May her soul rest in peace and may the souls of all those who have perished in the Mediterranean rest in peace.

11 Bodies off the Libyan Coast and the Search for Eritrean Families



On June 7, 2024, Seabird spotted 11 bodies at sea off the Libyan coast²⁵. The bodies were recovered by the Geo Barents ship of the NGO MSF²⁶.

Mem.Med was contacted by several Eritrean families in Europe who suspected that their loved ones, who had left Libya between May 22 and 24, 2024, might be among the bodies recovered. These were young men, aged between 17 and 36. Many had been able to speak to their families just before departure.

We activated the necessary legal support and began collecting useful information (physical and biometric data, recent photos) about the missing persons to file formal missing persons reports with the competent authorities. The bodies found were in an advanced state of decomposition, making identification through photographs impossible. Additionally, the relatives were unaware of the details of the clothing worn at the time of departure.

²⁵ <https://sea-watch.org/en/12-bodies-discovered-by-sea-watch-monitoring-aircraft-in-the-mediterranean/>

²⁶ <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2024/06/naufregio-mediterraneo-undici-corpi-di-migranti-recuperati-al-largo-della-libia-b15da0e6-7d92-4f50-a119-57bdd2a5c0c2.html>

Therefore, the only viable route was DNA comparison to verify the identities of the bodies, which are now buried in Sicily. To this end, some relatives travelled to Milan for information but then returned to their countries of residence without solutions. The Eritrean community network later connected them to our association to understand what procedures to follow for DNA sampling.

The Eritrean families of the missing individuals live in France, Germany, and Switzerland. They are brothers and sisters who migrated to Europe in search of peace and justice, hoping their relatives would eventually join them. All have experienced the atrocities of the journey to Europe and the torture in Libya.

The lawyer from our association initially had to verify, with the relevant authorities, the precise location of the bodies' discovery, how long they had been in the water, and key biometric data, as these factors are crucial for establishing the likelihood that the recovered bodies could belong to those missing.

During this period, our association worked to find contacts with the Red Cross committees in the countries where the families of the missing individuals live, to initiate the formal steps required for DNA sampling for comparison with the bodies.

It is worth noting that some relatives, when they went to the local Red Cross offices, encountered significant difficulties: some staff members didn't know how to help, while others refused to provide direct information, requesting that they communicate through our association. This was questionable, as the relatives themselves were the ones with the most relevant information about their loved ones.

Nevertheless, we sent a detailed email to the PFL (Protecting Family Link) of the International Red Cross, which intervened with the local Red Cross committees to facilitate communication and information exchange.

Over the years, we have observed that, even within the Red Cross, there is no standard practice regarding the search for missing persons. Each country follows its own rules. Thus, the Eritrean community, which is self-organised and has vast experience of migration trauma and the death of loved ones at sea, plays a crucial role in helping to manage the process and provide support to families.

“How long will it take to know if my brother is among the bodies found?” “Can I see his body?” “He has no close relatives left; it’s just me, a cousin. I know this makes DNA testing complicated, but he had no one else,” says V.T. in despair. “The families back home are waiting for news; everyone is very worried. My mother can’t stop crying.”



Ibne Hassan and Ishtiaq the 10 bodies of Bangladeshi citizens

On June 16, 2024, Ishtiaq leaves Libya aboard a "death boat" to reach Italy, specifically Lampedusa, where he never arrives. On June 17, the German NGO ResqShip's vessel, Nadir, rescues 51 people²⁷ from a distressed boat, including 10 lifeless bodies, one of which is Ishtiaq's. The bodies were found in the bottom of the ship's hold. To retrieve the bodies, the Nadir crew had to tear open the hold and bring all the bodies back to shore alongside the survivors²⁸. The bodies were buried in three Sicilian provinces: Caltanissetta, Agrigento, and Enna.

Thanks to ResqShip, some civil society actors, and individual researchers, we began reconstructing the journey and stories of these individuals. We discovered that the 10 deceased were all Bangladeshi men. Alam, a close friend of Ishtiaq's from Bangladesh, contacts us on June 22. He had been following news about the tragedy on social media and was deeply concerned:

"Ishtiaq hasn't called his family since he left Libya. It's not like him—he's always in touch with his parents. We are worried and need help. We heard that some Bangladeshis survived a shipwreck, and one of them might be Ishtiaq. Can you tell us who they are? Where are they? His family is desperate to know."

After some investigation, we confirmed that Ishtiaq was not among the survivors. His family was devastated, and we initiated the missing person report. Personal belongings and documents found on the bodies led us to believe that one of the deceased might be Ishtiaq. His family requested that his body be repatriated to Bangladesh.

²⁷ https://www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2024/06/17/ship-rescues-51-migrants-10-dead-on-board-boat_0de7854e-4fc3-4b59-b0ba-a9d9b98f845e.html

²⁸ <https://www.agrigentonotizie.it/cronaca/lampedusa-sbarco-migranti-estratti-cadaveri-ong-nadir-17-giugno-2024.html>

Our association reached out to the Bangladesh Embassy, which was already working on assisting families with identifying the bodies and offered to cover the costs for repatriating the deceased. At first, we didn't know the exact locations of the bodies as they had already been buried. However, after verifying the correct locations with a local funeral agency and some researchers, we were able to locate Ishtiaq's body and informed the Prefecture and the Embassy.

On July 23, Alam, still in Dhaka amidst ongoing protests, called us. The Bangladeshi government had closed universities and cut off internet access, making communication difficult. Alam asked for information about the next steps for repatriating his friend's body

while caught in the middle of a protest against government reforms. Since July 16, about 200 protesters had been killed by the national security forces²⁹, and the streets were under heavy military presence with a curfew³⁰.

Despite the challenging situation, Alam persisted. After receiving authorization to exhume the body, Ishtiaq's remains were repatriated on September 22, 2024.

The remaining bodies of the Bangladeshi citizens found by the Nadir ship remain buried in Sicilian cemeteries, according to the wishes of their families. We recently met with these families to express our condolences and renew our commitment to helping them should they decide to repatriate their loved ones' bodies in the future. We received this message from Alam:

“Ishtiaq dreamed of reaching Europe to build a better life and reunite with many friends who had left the country long ago. He wanted to support his family, which was facing great difficulties. He had to pay a large sum of money to cross the Mediterranean from Libya. His dreams and hopes died with him, leaving behind a family completely devastated.”

²⁹ <https://www.amnesty.it/in-bangladesh-e-strage-di-manifestanti-almeno-170-morti/>

³⁰ Il 6 Agosto la premier Hasina è fuggita in India, l'esercito ha sciolto il Parlamento annunciando la formazione di un nuovo governo e le elezioni. La transizione è guidata dal premio nobel per la pace Mohammad Yunus.



Ijaz Firas

Ijaz Firas, a 32-year-old man from Punjab, Pakistan, left Tobruk, Libya, on June 26, 2024, aboard a fishing boat with 186 other passengers. He died during the crossing³¹ between June 29 and 30, 2024.

The NGO SOS Humanity, conducting SAR operations in the Mediterranean, had received a distress call when the boat was still within Malta's SAR zone. After a first call from the crew to the Maltese authorities went unanswered, the Italian Coast Guard assumed coordination, ordering the Humanity 1 ship to assess the situation while keeping a distance. Rescue operations were carried out at 5:30 a.m. by two Italian Coast Guard boats and one naval vessel, after which the people on board were transferred to the Humanity 1 ship.

The ship then headed to Catania, where the survivors disembarked on June 30, and Ijaz's body was transported to shore. Before arriving in the Sicilian port, the NGO crew contacted Mem.Med to inform them of the deceased person, whose nationality and some personal details were known, thanks to other passengers who had gathered information.

Thanks to this contact, we were able to trace the deceased's family through the Pakistani community in Italy. A few days later, Ijaz's cousin Tariq got in touch with us, saying he was travelling to Catania on behalf of his parents, who believed the body found was their son's.

After supporting Tariq in his search for his cousin, we learned that Ijaz's body was at the Policlinico hospital mortuary in Catania. Tariq made contact with the Pakistani Embassy to begin the process of repatriating the body, but the procedure was slow, and Tariq was asked to mediate between several offices involved in handling the body. The costs of repatriation were beyond the family's means, and Tariq had to organise a fundraiser to cover the expenses, as the Pakistani consular authorities did not provide financial assistance.

Meanwhile, Tariq had to return to Ancona for work, but with solidarity support from Sicily, he managed to raise more funds. Finally, by the end of August, Ijaz's body was repatriated to his family.

³¹ https://www.ansa.it/sicilia/notizie/2024/07/02/sos-humanity-italia-ritarda-il-soccorso-un-migrante-e-morto_cb42168d-8bb8-422b-8338-acc3dc75f6f0.html

At the end of this sad and violent story, Tariq sends us a message:

"I don't know if we will ever know whether Ijaz could have survived if help had arrived sooner. He was already very ill before leaving, and that's one of the reasons he left. This journey, under those conditions, led to his death in a cruel and unjust way. He couldn't wait to reach us in Italy and start a new life."



Youssef Kafafy

Youssef Kafafy, a 17-year-old from a village in Beheira, Egypt, left his hometown in 2023 to reach Libya. Unable to obtain a regular visa, which is systematically denied to Egyptians and others from countries south of the Mediterranean, Youssef decided to risk the sea route to try to reach Europe and begin a new life.

His boat, departing from Zwara with 43 people on board, capsized off Lampedusa on July 7, 2024. Two days later, on July 9, the body of Youssef Kafafy was recovered by the Italian Coast Guard³² near the Tabaccara area of Lampedusa.

News reports mentioned a minor from Egypt being found along with two other adult men and partially identified by some of the other survivors from the same boat. Youssef's parents, Mona and Elomda, contacted the Lampedusa association in Lampedusa to inquire about their son's fate. A few days later, Mem.Med got in touch with Mona to gather information about her son's journey.

With the legal procedures initiated, we worked with the Agrigento prosecutor's office to submit a missing person report and request identification of the body, which the family believed might be Youssef's. After a visual identification by the family, represented by their lawyer, Youssef was officially recognized. The family then worked with the authorities to secure a death certificate and the necessary paperwork for repatriation.

³² <https://www.agrigentooggi.it/guardia-costiera-recupera-corpo-giovane-si-tratta-di-uno-di-tre-dispersi-dopo-sbarco-autonomo/>

Thanks to the Egyptian Embassies support in Rome, Youssef's body was flown to Cairo on August 26, 2024, where his family held funeral rites.

Youssef was the most precious and beautiful thing in the world to us; his death is so hard to bear (...). No matter how much time passes, we will never forget our dear Youssef and will always be here to remember his unjust death.



Abdulrahman Alhelo

Abdulrahman Alhelo, a young Syrian man of just 22 years old, embarked from Libya in early August 2024, hoping to reach Italy along with 34 other travellers. They departed from Zawtin in a makeshift boat,

and after hours at sea, as later recounted by survivors, they issued a distress signal just a few miles off the Sicilian coast due to extreme weather conditions and poor nighttime visibility. However, rescue efforts were delayed, and the boat was only reached at night by the Italian Coast Guard.

According to preliminary reports released by the Coast Guard involved³³, on the night of August 3, 2024, a CP 323 patrol boat approached the vessel at high speed approximately 17 miles off the coast of Syracuse. A collision between the two vessels caused the migrants' boat to capsize, throwing its passengers into the sea. Despite the migrants promptly activating all flashlights they had to signal their presence, many ended up in the water due to the violent impact. They were eventually rescued by the same Coast Guard, except for one: Abdulrahman, who remains missing to this day.

³³ <https://www.guardiacostiera.gov.it/stampa/Pages/Comunicato-stampa-del-04.08.2024.aspx>

Search efforts coordinated by the Coast Guard in Catania began in the hours following the incident, but no trace of Abdulrahman has been found since that night. Two other people later died—Shaouqi during the transfer to Syracuse port and Abu Hamza after being hospitalised at Umberto I Hospital. Ten other passengers were admitted to hospitals in the region, including Syracuse, Avola, and Lentini, due to severe injuries sustained in the collision.

The dynamics of the incident remain unclear, although it is difficult to imagine that the migrant boat was not precisely detected, especially given the deployment of the “Manta” surveillance aircraft during the rescue operation. The Syracuse Prosecutor’s Office has acquired records documenting the intervention and opened an investigation to establish the facts. The local police and forensics teams are still investigating the collision and the causes of death for those who were initially rescued alive. However, two migrants have already been detained on accusations of human smuggling and are being charged with negligent shipwreck, manslaughter, and deaths resulting from another crime.

Abdulrahman’s sister, Dua Al-Hlou, who resides in Germany, had spoken to her brother just moments before his departure and was waiting for him on this side of the Mediterranean, which had kept them apart for at least five years.

“I always dream that my brother is alive and that I’ll meet him and hug him again. I don’t know if my dream will come true, but if my brother has died in this tragedy, I hope we can at least find his body to free ourselves from this anxiety and these terrible thoughts.”

Upon learning of the shipwreck, she immediately took action to search for him, reporting his disappearance to the relevant authorities and reaching out to several organisations active on the ground. Mem.Med received her report through Nadia, a volunteer from Naga in Milan, who facilitated communication between Dua and the team. After reconstructing the initial facts, Mem.Med met with Dua, along with a lawyer, to officially register the case and gather any information she had. Dua provided testimony from survivors of the shipwreck and relatives of the deceased, which was shared directly with her. A formal complaint has been filed with the Prosecutor’s Office, and we await a response from the authorities.

“I can’t believe there’s no trace of my brother—neither among the living nor the dead.”

It's an indescribable feeling; my heart is shattered with grief. I was anxiously waiting for him. I don't understand such disregard for human lives. How can a rescue pilot go so fast without noticing small boats ahead of them? Are there no radars or cameras on their ships? I can't believe it."



The Roccella Jonica Massacre

On the night between June 16 and 17, 2024, a shipwreck occurred involving a boat that had departed

from the port of Bodrum in Turkey, carrying approximately 67 people (26 of whom were minors), around 120 miles off the coast of Calabria, in front of the shores of Roccella Jonica. This is yet another story of people who crossed the Mediterranean and lost their lives due to European policies of blockades and containment, responsible for thousands of deaths. In this case, Alarmphone had issued a warning before the tragedy, alerting the relevant authorities about the boat's distress, but in vain, as the alarm was ignored, and the boat sank.

There was imprecise information regarding the total number of bodies recovered. Several civil society organisations were alerted by relatives from the countries of origin, as well as from Italy, who were seeking information about the fate of their loved ones and, due to the **lack of clear communication from the Italian authorities**, were unable to understand either the locations or the offices responsible for handling the consequences of the shipwreck.

During those days, Mem.Med, having received several reports from families in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran, travelled **to Calabria to support the arriving families and monitor what was happening.** As highlighted in the aforementioned report, the communication from the authorities regarding the search and recovery operations for the bodies at sea was immediately lacking and, in some cases, misleading³⁴: the information provided was scattered in brief statements that were often incomplete and inconsistent. There was a **lack of transparency about the numbers and the movement of the victims' bodies.**

On this occasion, **the Mem.Med Mediterranean Memory Association and the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI) had sent a letter to the relevant regional and national authorities³⁵,** urging attention to a series of important issues regulated by national and international laws regarding the treatment of migrant bodies, their identification, and dignified burial.

A reconstruction of what happened in Roccella was also broadcast months after the tragedy, during the television show *Report*³⁶ on Rai 3 on October 27, 2024.

Therefore, in order to better understand the dynamics and obtain more information from the relevant authorities in an effort to stop the process of invisibility and contribute to counteracting the strategy of silence surrounding the shipwreck, while providing support to the families of the missing and the survivors, **Mem.Med submitted a request for general civic access to**

the Prefecture of Reggio Calabria at the end of August 2024. Among other things, the request sought data and information about the number of bodies found and identified or not; the number of bodies repatriated; the number of bodies from which DNA was taken; the number of bodies identified among those buried in Armo, and the procedures followed for the recovery of bodies and the potential identification of bodies still unidentified, along with the entities involved.

The Prefecture of Reggio Calabria, on September 26, 2024, partially responded to the civic access request, stating that **35 bodies had been recovered at sea**, of which 10 were men, 9 were women, and 15 were minors (8 males and 7 females), with one body unidentified, all victims of the June 17 shipwreck off the Ionian coast. Additionally, it reported that **14 of these bodies were repatriated to their country of origin** (13 by Iraqi state flight and one by a flight organised by the Diocesan Caritas), while the remaining **21 bodies were buried at a local cemetery in Armo, Reggio Calabria.** Finally, regarding the procedures followed, the Prefecture reported that the search and recovery operations at sea were coordinated by the General Command of the Coast Guard, using several naval units. After being recovered, the bodies were transferred ashore on subsequent dates between June 19 and 24. It was also specified that **"the number of missing persons is unknown."**

34 https://x.com/scandura/status/1804466294420357623?xt=nsFvrrQ4MUAXXyzAwjdJw&s=09&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR2QyH1a8tnx7f2TcJ7LnJP0Obhf8GYwftWLIZ2KmwzPEBCr0xEc7bPE9c_aem_ppdlDsFBsGSRil4ndymCyA

35 Si veda: https://memoriamediterranea.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Lettera-Roccella-autorita-competenti_Mem.Med-e-ASGI.pdf

36 <https://www.rai.it/programmi/report/inchieste/La-strage-nascosta-38b9253b-4d81-429c-b3b1-95fd7936b6dd.html>

Regarding the **DNA sampling**, according to the Prefecture, the Regional Cabinet for Calabria of the Scientific Police “took biological samples in double form to extract the genetic profiles of the bodies, for subsequent comparison with the samples provided by the victims' relatives,” though the results had not been communicated at the time of the response.

In light of the partial response, a **request for review** under Article 5, Paragraph 7, of Legislative Decree 33/2013 was submitted to obtain more specific information regarding the age, gender, nationality of the victims, methods used for body identification, and the number of identified persons buried in Calabria. The Prefecture of Reggio Calabria responded on October 21, 2024, stating that investigations by the Judicial

Authority were still ongoing, and “there are needs to protect the investigative secret, which would preclude disclosure under Article 5-bis, paragraph 1, letter f) of Legislative Decree 133/2013.³⁷”

In light of the challenges in accessing information and based on the systemic gaps observed over the years regarding the management of migrant and foreign deaths and disappearances, it seems essential to continue supporting and spreading the words and actions of those involved in these violent events — including some of **the families of the Roccella massacre, who have recently taken action to learn about the fate of their loved ones** — and to maintain a focus on the procedures followed while continuing to denounce the necropolitics that characterise the border regime.

CONCLUSION



The families who fight to find their missing or deceased loved ones, to bring the bodies of their relatives home, are fighting against oblivion, against states that disdain life.

³⁷ L'articolo prevede che l'accesso civico di cui all'articolo 5, comma 2, è rifiutato se il diniego è necessario per evitare un pregiudizio concreto alla tutela di uno degli interessi pubblici inerenti a: a) la sicurezza pubblica e l'ordine pubblico; b) la sicurezza nazionale; c) la difesa e le questioni militari; d) le relazioni internazionali; e) la politica e la stabilità finanziaria ed economica dello Stato; f) la conduzione di indagini sui reati e il loro perseguimento; g) il regolare svolgimento di attività ispettive.

These families fight against racism, against the violence of the border, and against invisibility. They fight for the dreams of their loved ones to be remembered, for their memories to be respected, for their pain to be acknowledged, and for justice to be done.

Despite the increasingly repressive European and Mediterranean context, uniting forces is not only effective, but essential, as recently demonstrated by the case of Maysoon Majidi. **Some counter-trend decisions inspire courage:** on September 14, 2024, the Palermo Public Prosecutor requested a **6-year prison sentence for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, Matteo Salvini**, who in August 2019 prevented the Open Arms NGO ship from disembarking the rescued persons.

This news comes alongside the November 6, 2024, announcement that the Crotona Prosecutor's Office has requested a **trial for six soldiers under investigation for their responsibility in the Cutro massacre** that occurred between February 25 and 26, 2023. There were "delays" and "omissions" that cost the lives of more than 100 people.

In the face of a border regime that kills, the response we can give is political, **a concrete politics that challenges intimidation, bureaucratic and legal obstacles, and loneliness.** A response that creates links between the shores of the Mediterranean, that builds networks to support each other in the fight for a world without borders, respectful of the life of every individual.