

# The Sahara

EUrope's new deadly external border

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December 2018

A publication by *borderline europe* – Menschenrechte ohne  
Grenzen and Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung



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Photo by Andrea Stäritz

#### Andrea Stäritz

is a journalist and consultant focusing on West Africa since close to 20 years. After having worked in Nigeria for 5 years, she returned to Berlin in the end of 2017 where she joined borderline -europe to strengthen the work on the externalized borders in Africa. She has contributed to the Migration Control Project of Tageszeitung from West Africa and is now focusing on human rights violations on the new southern border of the European Union in Africa.



Photo by Julia Stier

#### Julia Stier

just came back from her research period in Dakar, Senegal and is currently writing her two Master theses in African Studies and Social Sciences at Humboldt-University in Berlin. At borderline -europe, she established the section working on the externalization of the EU border and migration policies on the African continent in early 2017. In her research she is particularly focusing on developments in West Africa concerning EU migration politics.

#### Resources

'Dokumentationsstelle der Antirassistischen Initiative Berlin (2018): Bundesdeutsche Flüchtlingspolitik und ihre tödlichen Folgen. Berlin: Antirassistische Initiative E.V.

# Preface

by **Andrea Stäritz & Julia Stier**

In 1993, the German government ratified the so-called ‘asylum compromise’, changing the constitutional right to asylum. Consequently victims of civil war would not have the right to asylum but would get subsidiary protection with limited rights. This was never really applied and for the first time used more than 20 years later for Syrian refugees. Further the concept of Safe Third Countries was introduced. As a direct consequence of this ‘asylum compromise’, border controls were reinforced, especially on airports, and refugees started to cross the European external borders by feet. First cases of drowning were reported only a few months later. All together, 19 refugees from mainly Sri Lanka died at the then East-European border between Germany and Poland in the river Neiße in the year 1994. Most likely, there is a high number of unreported cases. Borderline- europe was founded in 2007 when the death toll was tremendously increasing in the Mediterranean and first rescue operations of Non-Governmental Organizations started. The main focus of borderline europe is to inform media and the general public on human rights violations at the European external and internal borders. Since many years Bildungswerk Berlin of Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung is an indispensable partner for borderline-europe’s work. Many events and conferences have been organized together. First people died in

the rivers Oder and Neiße when these rivers were still physical EU borders. Today Agadez in Niger is considered the virtual externalized border of the European Union. European financial aid, technical devices, military check points and drone surveillance in the desert are the main pillars of an externalized EU border. In preparation of the 2005 EU enlargement, asylum law was harmonized and Frontex as a European border control agency was founded. The Rabat Process (2006) and the Khartoum Process (2014) gave birth to the new virtual EU borders in North Africa and the Sahara. Third countries became Europe’s door keepers and the border control was externalized. To counter the underreported death toll in the Sahara in consequence of the externalized EU borders, borderline-europe is networking with other activists in Europe and Africa. This documentation wants to inform and is based on workshops and conferences in the years 2017 and 2018 that were organized in cooperation with Bildungswerk Berlin of Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Andrea Stäritz and Julia Stier  
borderline europe – Menschenrechte ohne Grenzen e.V.

# “Defending” EUropean borders in the Sahara

by **Andrea Stäritz**

The November 2017 images of slave auctions shocked the international public. CNN had shot a dubious video and suddenly the horrific situation of migrants in Libya took the headlines. This article will show the different reactions to the so-called news. In reality, these living conditions of migrants and of those in transition in Libya were known for a while, also to the embassies, the EU and the broader international community.

Has anything changed in Libya? Hardly.  
At least not for the better.

## Resources

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/DMM/AVRR/avrr-2017-key-highlights.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMM/AVRR/avrr-2017-key-highlights.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/we-do-not-return-hell-migrants-refuse-leave-ship-standoff-libyan-authorities-965458684>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/cruel-european-migration-policies-leave-refugees-trapped-in-libya-with-no-way-out/>

<sup>5</sup>Factsheet EUCAP Sahel  
<https://bit.ly/2r3DmuK>

<sup>6</sup>Promotional film by Bundeswehr  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R08iTAmyMTE>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hundreds-migrants-rescued-faulty-vessels-between-morocco-and-spain-moroccan-navy-says-618819172>

<sup>8</sup><https://alarmphone.org/en/2018/09/06/they-took-us-they-even-deported-us-inshallah-next-time/>

## Amnesty International

published its report in November 2017 and called for a stop of the cruel EU policy<sup>4</sup> - but was more or less unheard. Amnesty had criticized the three pillars of the European Union policy aimed at stopping migration: the boosting of the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept sea crossings, striking deals with militias in Libya and hampering the work of NGOs carrying out search and rescue operations. These EU policies have contributed to a nearly 80% drop in the numbers of people crossing the Central Mediterranean Route and arriving in Italy, from 114,415 between January and November 2017 to 22-232 so far in 2018 (Jan – Oct).

**UNHCR** has established a Temporary Emergency Evacuation and Transit mechanism (ETM) in Niger. Evacuees and deportees are screened to check whether they are eligible for resettlement programs. It concerns only a very small number of people, considered as refugees. The UN refugee organisation has evacuated 1609 people; only 467 cases were submitted for resettlement. As of 22 May 2018, 11 States have provided a total of 3781 resettlement places for the Libya-Niger situation. Out of these pledges, 1100 will be used for direct out of Libya resettlement proceedings while 2681 places will be allocated to evacuees from Libya and refugees registered in Niger.

Mostly unnoticed the **African Union**, **European Union** and International Organization of Migration (**IOM**) have formed a joined task force to evacuate refugees and migrants from Libya starting from December 2017. The task force was limited for a period of six months and evacuated some 15,000 people to Niger. Only a bit more than 1000 people stayed, but the vast majority was directly flown to their country of origin. The EU Africa Trust Fund financially backed the operation. The strategic plan of the EU to build up platforms for migrants and refugees in the Maghreb had not been successful. Instead, **IOM** and **UNHCR** created facilities in Niger to receive refugees, migrants and deportees.



Makeshift camps in Agadez, Source: Afrique Europe Interact

While UNHCR has asked for 40,000 resettlement places as of 22 May 2018, 11 states have committed less than a tenth of this numbers for resettlement from Libya.

**IOM**, within the framework of the program “voluntary return” is dealing with the vast majority of evacuation, deportations and expulsions. IOM Voluntary Return Program is a very efficient program which is lacking critical reporting. Germany is the top country with 41% of returnees, Niger is the top transit country (2016): 98,00 returns; in 2017: 72,100 returns. Today, IOM operates seven camps in Niger for returnees from Libya: One in Arlit (300 places), one in Dirkou (150 places), one in Agadez

(1000 places) and three in Niamey (for a total of 300 places); one of them is accommodating unaccompanied minors and vulnerable women, some of whom are victims of trafficking. The centres have been financially backed with 91.9 million Euros from the EU Africa Trust Fund. Allegedly, the Republic of Niger accepts only 1500 people at any given moment on their soil. In total, IOM claims that since January 2017 about 23,500 migrants have received immediate post -arrival and reception assistance; 16,000 migrants have been assisted with general reintegration support such as referrals and counselling sessions and only 5000 people have received additional reintegration support like

help to set up a small business. IOM is pursuing a very effective media strategy. Side-lining critical journalists IOM is providing testimonies of migrants who are grateful, happy and overwhelmed with emotions when coming back home. These testimonies talk about the support of stranded migrants, the assistance to return and a small grant to open a business. But, the figures of IOM show, that only 5000 people really received the small grant to reintegrate, but another 40,000 were returned and got nothing more than first aid, something to eat and a good advice. In the annual report 2017<sup>2</sup> IOM even stipulates that 72,176 “profited” from the voluntary return program.

IOM Camp in Agadez, Source: Christian Jakob



## Reaction

**AU, EU and IOM join hands to evacuate from Libya**

Reaction

2

Refugees and Migrants increase resistance to the new strategy of the European Union to push back or pull back people trying to cross the Mediterranean.

In mid-November 2018, the case of migrants refusing to disembark an Italian container ship shed light on the atrocious situation for migrants in Libya. For 19 days migrants refused to disembark the **Nivin**<sup>3</sup> – only to find themselves being arrested, detained again in Libya and accused of piracy and terrorism. The abuse of refugees and migrants for political purposes already had another sad peak in August 2018: the **Disciotti**, an Italian border patrol board had rescued hundreds of

people but were not allowed to disembark in Italy. After a hunger strike and international diplomatic efforts, finally the refugees were allowed to disembark, after a couple of European countries agreed to host them. The Italian Justice is now investigating the Minister of Interior for “unlawful detention” and “abuse of administrative powers”.

Migrants travelling at night. Photo: Christian Jakob



Reaction

3

Europe reinforces the militarizatio of the region

On November 12 this year, Germany opened its first “military outpost” in Africa. EUCAP Sahel has a multiple mission: to combat terrorism and stop illicit trades with narcotics and humans as well as (since 2015) migration . The EUTM – training mission in Mali is the first major contribution of German armed forces in Africa. In April, the mandate

of the EUTM has been expanded to Niger, Chad and Mauretania in order to support the troops of G5 Sahel (Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania and Burkina Faso). The Sahel G5 was originally created as an African force to fight terrorism (Al Qaida). Since 2017 the European Union is contributing 5 million Euros.

Reaction






4

The migrant routes are shifting from Libya back to Algeria and Morocco

The Spanish coastguard, meanwhile, said on Sunday, November 18 2018<sup>7</sup> , that it had rescued nearly 1200 people bound for Spain in a 48-hour period. A total of 38,451 migrants have arrived in Spain by sea from the start of the year until 3rd of October 2018, according to the International Organization for Migration. Also the Moroccan Coast Guard is pressuring for more money to gear up their rescue operations and pull back refugees who are on boats in the Mediterranean.

That makes Spain the leading destination for migrants this year, outpacing both Italy and Greece. Deaths in the Mediterranean remain high, the IOM says, at 1777 so far in 2018. But that number remains lower than the 2,749 deaths recorded at the same time last year.

Total arrivals by sea and deaths in the mediterranean 2017-2018

Country Of Arrivals	1 JANUARY - 3 OCTOBER 2018		1 - 3 OCTOBER 2018	1 JANUARY - 3 OCTOBER 2017	
	Arrivals	Deaths	Arrivals	Arrivals	Deaths
Italy 	21,119	1,261 (Central Med. route)	95	106,876	2,558 (Central Med. route)
Malta 	714 (IOM est)		0	n/a	
Greece 	23,560	118 (Eastern Med. route)	320	1,934	46 (Eastern Med. route)
Cyprus 	501		16	501 (as of 31 July)	
Spain 	38,451	398 (Western Med. route)	1,060	12,366 (as of 30 Sept)	145 (Western Med. route)
Estimated Total:	84,345	1,737	1,491	139,677	7,749

Design by Andrea Picadaci; source of data IOM

Reaction

5

Algeria is deporting migrants and refugees to the Sahara

As we have seen in the 90s, another strategy to make the borders invincible is to clear neighbouring countries from refugees. Deportation from Algeria has increased dramatically since December 2016. From December 2016 to March 2018 about 27,000 migrants have been expelled. A new wave was launched this year in June. Homes of Sub-Saharan Africans were raided and thousands of people arrested and carried away with trucks<sup>8</sup> . About 13,000 deportees were abandoned in the desert.

IOM reports, that they rescued 7000 migrants at the Niger border from January to May 2018. In July 2018 these deportations were stopped after an international outcry. But, already there are thousands who have lost their lives.

Data on deaths of migrants compiled by IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre. All numbers are mininum estimates. Arrivals based on data from respective governments and IOM field offices.



Joint EU and Niger military patrol: New EU vehicles (left) and Niger light pick-ups. (Photo: Christian Jakob)

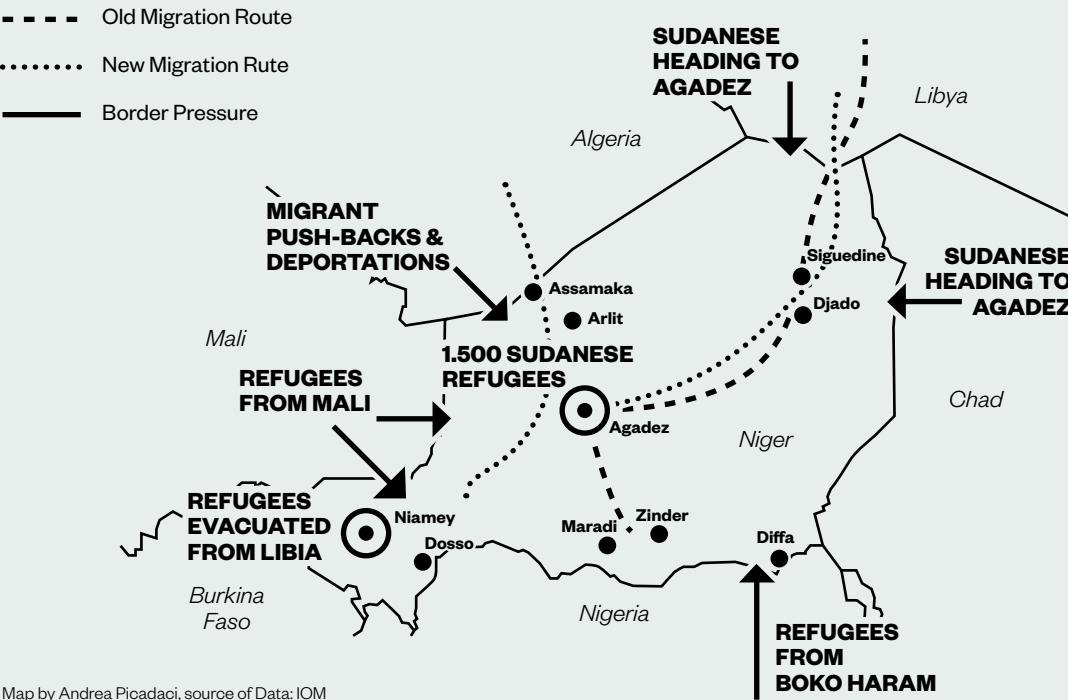
Reaction

6

Agadez is becoming the EU external border

The Republic of Niger is everybody's darling as the government headed by president Issoufou is doing its best to implement the EU policy to control the borders in a third country –while it is not even a neighboring country of the European Union. The Republic of Niger, earlier known as the most fragile African state because of food insecurity, has

become the main focus for EU migration experts. While border crossing of some ten thousand people are not a lot in the highly migratory West Africa with its 600 million inhabitants, these numbers become evidence of a threat when being translated into graphics of IOM. And, these numbers become the basis for EU activities in Niger.



Map by Andrea Picadaci, source of Data: IOM

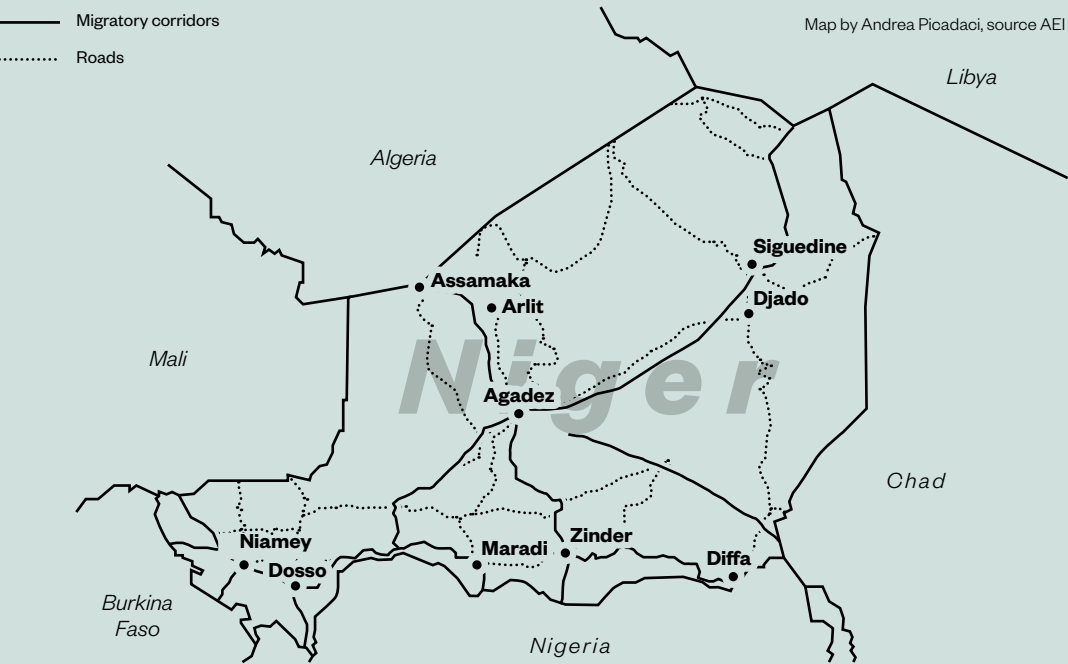


Ibrahim Manzo Diallo

is a journalist based in northern Niger, Agadez. He is the founder of the media group Air Info, which publishes the bi-monthly regional Air Info in Agadez and Damagaram. The press group has a Radio in Agadez called Radio Sahara FM. Ibrahim Manzo DIALLO is known for his daring investigations in the field of security in the Sahel, criminal trafficking, corruption, and migration. He is the winner of several awards both in Niger and internationally. He is also a founding member of Alarm Phone Sahara

# The Sahara a cemetery under the open sky

Human rights violations caused by the new border regime



by Ibrahim Manzo Diallo

Agadez was once a center of commerce and transport. People traveling North passed through the city without any difficulties or visa restrictions. Today, Niger can be considered the virtual border of the European Union. The EU has externalized its border to the Nigerien territory and Nigerien authorities control migrants and refugees and prevent them from traveling further North. To do this, the Nigerien government is receiving huge amounts of money from the EU. According to the IOM, the numbers of migrants passing through Niger fell from 5000 to 7000 persons per week in 2017 to 5000 persons per month in 2018. The IOM itself states that this is a

direct consequence of the strict measures taken by the Nigerien authorities like the law 2015-036 on human trafficking. This law passed parliament on May 26 in 2015 and is used to stop drivers and to close the so-called ghettos; this is how houses are called, which provide accommodation to migrants.

## Consequences of the law 2015-036

All member states of the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) have agreed on free movement and free circulation of goods in the ECOWAS. In spite of the binding protocol of 1976 (!) Niger is

### The law 2015/036

From 2014 to 2015 around 250,000 people passed through Agadez to go further North to Algeria or Libya, many of them probably having Europe as final destination in mind. As a consequence the Nigerien parliament passed the law 2015-036 which was meant to protect migrants from the abuse of traffickers. But in reality, this law, financed by the EU, is a huge obstacle to migrants who see themselves deprived of the right of free movement by control-posts and check-points.

### The flow of migration

**1,080,000**

**Entries** (of these, 385,589 were foreigners)

### At the borders

**7,688**

**Deported** (at national borders after controls inside Niger)

### In the desert

**2,317**

**Abandoned in the desert**

### Libya Evacuations

**913**

**Refugees flown to Niger from Libya**

Source of Data: IOM

blocking migrants and restricting trade and transport. Before 2015, people and vehicles could easily circulate in Niger and also move to the neighboring countries Algeria and Libya. Under the new law over 100 vehicles have been confiscated and many drivers have been accused of human trafficking. Some of them were found guilty and are still in prison. Furthermore, hosting or helping migrants in Agadez is under punishment now. This means that people who gave accommodation or shelter to migrants in transit now lost their source of income. Economically, this is very difficult for the inhabitants of Agadez and many people have lost their major source of income. It is also impossible for them to work in Algeria or Libya now because they themselves cannot pass to the North since they are also seen as potential migrants to Europe. And, migrants and refugees cannot legally travel by public transport beyond Agadez. They are forced to take the much more dangerous irregular routes. The military is controlling water dwells which means that migrants passing through the desert cannot stop there anymore to refill their water bottles. Afraid of being arrested traffickers often abandon passengers in the middle of the desert as soon as they see any sign of a military control. In most cases this leads to the passengers' death.

Confiscated vehicles in Agadez. Photo: Christian Jakob



Car with migrants stuck un the desert . Photo: Christian Jakob



Today, people in Niger talk about the Sahara as an open sky cemetery. In contrast to the public attention on the Mediterranean, the deaths in the desert remain unknown and unnoticed by the European society. Under the pretext of security issues the access to the desert of Ténéré in the North of Niger is forbidden to any European and especially to the International media. Even if journalists arrive in Niger they cannot go North of the city of Agadez since it is considered a red zone by the French ministry of foreign affairs. So the reality, the drama happening in the desert every day, is hidden from the public and continues unnoticed.

**Niger has become Europe’s border patrol**

Since 2015, Niger is cooperating closely with the European Union to stop the irregular migrants. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of Niger Republic, justifies the fight against irregular migration: “The first reason is a moral one because as the African leader that I am, I find it unsupportable that thousands of Africans

are dying in the desert and in the Mediterranean. But Niger is also strongly engaged because of security. The traffickers bringing migrants to Libya come back to Niger with arms. This is a real security problem to Niger.” The active role of Niger in controlling migrants is rewarded financially by the EU. On the one hand, development projects in the North of the country are financed and on the other hand, Niger is getting direct support to operate against irregular migration networks of smugglers and other traffickers. Overall the European Union has promised to the government of Niger Republic a package of measures worth three billion Euros for the project cycle until 2020.

**Strategies of resistance**

In the beginning of 2018 Alarm Phone Sahara was founded and started its work of documenting the hidden truths of the desert. People from different regions North of Agadez were trained and received telephones so that they could take pictures and videos of the things that

they see in the desert: abandoned cars and the dried up bodies of migrants who died on their way through the Sahara. This work of documenting what is happening in the desert is very important since the media cannot access this area to report about what is really happening there. With of the documented material, Alarm Phone Sahara writes reports and deposes them at the Nigerien government, at several European embassies and international organizations in Niamey to make the reality in the desert visible. At the same time, Alarm Phone Sahara is informing future migrants about the dangers of the desert, not to block them from traveling but to save their lives through simple advices like to take enough water on the trip. Alarm Phone Sahara also has a phone number that migrants can call when they are in distress in the desert. The organization is collaborating with the mayors of many towns in the desert. They inform them about the migrants' call if the people are close to their towns so that the towns will then go on rescue operations.

The Alarm Phone Sahara Office in Agadez, Source: Ibrahim Manzo Diallo



# Interview with Kumut Imesh, film-maker of “Revenir – to return”

by **Andrea Stäritz**

**Andrea Stäritz (borderline-europe):**

In 2004 you fled from Ivory Coast to Europe and more or less 10 years later you revisited your escape route to shoot the film “Revenir”. What are the differences you experienced on the two trips?

**Kumut Imesh:**

What really changed is that there are many women now on the migration route, which is something that didn't exist before. Back then it was men who were travelling, labor migrants. Now you can see many women, young women, and young mothers with their children on the migration routes who are fleeing conflicts and wars in their countries of origin. They were living in neighboring countries for some time and trying to integrate but with time passing they realized that it wasn't possible to stay because their children did not get a good education and they were not treated well. So these women took the decision to find a better life for their children and to take the route to Europe. And that is really a shame.

And also in Niger many things changed. Niger is part of the ECOWAS and has to follow ECOWAS policies. The European Union is financing Niger and imposing with many agreements their border and migration control. Today we see that Europe has externalized its borders to Niger which is actually countering the ECOWAS agreements [especially the freedom of movement in all ECOWAS countries]. The migrants have huge difficulties to travel in Niger and are afraid to be arrested. Apart from that, human trafficking has increased. People cannot move freely and they cannot go back to their countries of origin either, they are kind of stuck and need professional help. Many bad things happen because of this. Another big difference is how people get organized now. That is kind of a positive aspect. People now communicate



**Kumut Imesh** is the filmmaker of “Revenir – to return” in which he is going back to the border of Ivory Coast where he started his flight to Europe in 2004, trying to take the same flight route one more time, but this time with a camera, documenting his experiences on the way. Kumut is currently living in France where he has founded an association.

through social media and telecommunication channels how to arrive at the borders and to cross them. Today, people arriving in Agadez already now about the routes to Algeria or to Libya. They know that some of their people are for example in Gatroun. We can really say, that people are more organized today. But, the access to other countries has become more difficult compared to when I first travelled. There are many border controls now and there are deportations and rejections at the borders. I was shocked to see a Cameroonian who was deported by Nigerien authorities. I was seriously upset to realize that an African cannot move freely on its own continent. That is really a shame. Every time you enter or exit a city in Niger now, there are checkpoints to control the migrants. Earlier, to move freely on the continent, you only had to be African, to have an ID card from your country to cross borders, to move from city to city. The migrants could go until Gatroun without difficulties, without the need of a visa. And people from Niger could go to Algeria without problems because there was this silent agreement allowing people from Niger to work in Algeria and to return afterwards. Today, travelling has become very, very difficult because of the reinforced borders.

## Niger has turned its back to the freedom of movement and the freedom of living and working in the ECOWAS region.

The unemployment rate in Niger has increased because the people working for example in the transport sector cannot do their work like before because of the border controls. To enter into Niger, even if you come from a member state of the ECOWAS, has become very difficult. It has become almost impossible to pass northwards of Agadez. To continue your route beyond Agadez is very risky. In spite of free movement policy in the ECOWAS region you need a visa to pass through Agadez now, which was not necessary before. Niger has turned its back to the freedom of movement and the freedom of living and working in the ECOWAS region. Niger is one of the African countries with a very high number of migrants who are supporting the national economy with their remittances. Almost a quarter of the population is working abroad. The remittances exceed far the amount of the European Union. This is what call a miscalculation. They do not compare what the Nigerien diaspora transfers to the funds the government is receiving from Europe. So it's not well thought through by the Nigerien authorities. They have to reevaluate these agreements, they have to establish something positive for the population but also positive for the European Union. 145 million Euros are given to the Nigerien government to prevent migration. And we know very well that these 145 million

Euros could really help the African population. If we have 100,000 migrants in this zone, that means that we have 1400 € per person. Even with half of this money the migrants would stay home, to work and make a lot of progress. This would be useful for Africa but also for

## With very positive and peaceful means you will find the solutions. So it's not the war against the migrants, it's not about a militarization of the borders or to dissuade the people. It's nothing of all of that. We need to search a positive solution.

Europe. Things have to change in order to allow circular migration. You need to permit Africans to come to Europe to study whatever they want. We know that African university students can come to Europe to study there. But what about those who are working as laborers? They cannot even come for a month to do an internship in Europe because it's illegal. They also need a chance to educate themselves. When I was living in Morocco for about five years, the number of migrants officially recognized by the UNHCR was hardly 1000 people, maybe 700 or 800, out of 10,000 migrants in Morocco. That means about 9,000 people were considered as migrants coming for economical reasons. If Europe would unblock funding and this funding would reach the right receivers, I think we could reduce migration instead of blocking migration. Migration is an opportunity; it's a very favorable thing for Europe and for African countries. So it's even more than avoiding the deaths in the desert and in the sea, it is about how to act in a more humanitarian way instead of acting in a too pragmatic way without thinking about the consequences.

**Andrea Stäritz:**

Some people say, Europe is profiting from the dangers in the desert, of the threat to be killed or tortured. All these threats are a good thing because it is protecting the European borders.

**Kumut Imesh:**

Actually, what you need to understand is that there are always two options and you always have a choice. It's not the torture or the difficulties on the way that will convince the migrants not to travel. For the migrants, it's the search for positive and peaceful solutions. If the EU would boot the job market in Niger, Ivory Coast and Ghana with 145 million Euros the migrants will fight for a place in a car to return back to their countries. You see, that's like the wind and the sun that are fighting. The wind says “I want to take the clothes off this man” and he is blowing very strongly.

The man will hold his clothes tighter. The sun instead will just shine peacefully and the man will take of his clothes by himself because he is sweating. With very positive and peaceful means you will find the solutions. So it's not the war against the migrants, it's not about a militarization of the borders or to dissuade the people. It's nothing of all of that. We need to search a positive solution.

**Andrea Stäritz:**

For a lot of people it is very difficult to talk about their experiences in Niger. Is this caused by the trauma or because of security reasons?

**Kumut Imesh:**

It was important for me to film the people or to record them because I wanted the people to talk for themselves. I didn't want to talk for them. It's clear that generally many people become victims for two reasons: Firstly, people are easily to be exploited because they do not have a regular status in Niger. Secondly, people are pressured not to talk. There are many police men who are false policemen and who play their power games.

So we have to say that the migrants are the victims of many physical attacks, numerous exploitations, countless frauds and horrible abuses.

There are people who are not even part of the real police that are profiting from this situation, wearing police costumes, blocking the streets for migrants, bringing them to a secret place to take their money pretending to be real policemen.

People are facing big problems. Migrants coming from Burkina Faso, Nigeria or Benin told me about many similar incidents on their way. It's really not easy. People lose a lot of money. There are also false traffickers telling you that they can bring you to Italy, to Spain. They ask to be paid on the spot, or parts of the fare. They are claiming to have contacts in many European cities to collect the rest later. The migrants believe it and give them 400 €, 600 €, everything they have. So we have to say that the migrants are the victims of many physical attacks, numerous exploitations, countless frauds and horrible abuses.

**Andrea Stäritz:**

Thank you very much for this interview, Kumut!

# Interview with Mohamed Mena, Gatroon Center of Human Rights

by Ibrahim Manzo Diallo

“We, migrants and citizens of Al Gatroon are living in peace – but we have to be ashamed of our leaders who are filling their pockets with money from the EU”

**Ibrahim Manzo Diallo:**

What is the Gatroon centre for human rights?

**Mohamed Mena:**

The Gatroon centre for human rights is an NGO and was established in 2011 by some youth, mostly Tubou people. We are a minority in Libya and discriminated against but in Gatroon we form the majority. We in Libya were facing the downfall of Ghadafi. The youth build the Centre to help our brothers from other African countries arriving in these times. Somehow, the Gatroon Human Rights Centre is reflecting what is happening in Libya. As an NGO we are working for the respect of human rights in general and especially for minority rights and migrant rights. Recently we concentrate on migrant rights because we have lots of human rights' violations against migrants and lots of problems happening against our brothers.

**Ibrahim Manzo Diallo:**

According to media reports, Libya has become an unfair and unsafe place for migrants. Is that true? What is happening now in your region, in Gatroon, in the South of Libya?

**Mohamed Mena:**

Unfortunately, we hear about a lot of human rights' violations against refugees, and also there are lots of violations against the Libyan citizen. Libya is not a stable state now, Libya has lots of problems, lots of struggles for power, arms are available in every place. Human rights violations are very common, and maybe the people who say that Libya is not safe and it's difficult to live in, are right.

Recently we have found a lot of abandoned cars and dead bodies between Gatroon and Agadez. The drivers see a lot of stranded and dead people. And we even don't have the means to bury them. We really would like to have a cemetery for them in the Gatroon area.

But this happens especially in some places in the North of Libya. We are in the South of Libya, in Gatroon City, where hundreds of refugees from Niger and Chad and from other African countries live. We work and live together since a long time. Migrants became part of the society and no one is disturbed by them or worried about them. Some violations of their rights and crimes happen in some of the neighbourhoods. But in general until now, we didn't cross the red line which means that state institutions have failed in general and there is chaos, we can find violations but it's still under control. Some crimes against the refugees take place but we cannot consider that Al Gatroon is a dangerous area to live in.

**Ibrahim Manzo Diallo:**

What's your own vision to fight against the human rights' violations in this area, in the dessert?

**Mohamed Mena:**

Our vision is the respect of human rights, the freedom of movement between the countries. The problems occur with the checkpoints; the limitations for cross-border transports. We are a small, very small foundation. We are an NGO and we don't have enough possibilities. We depend on our partners in watching these violations and documenting them. But we can suggest solutions to limit the unlawful activities in the desert. Recently we have found a lot of abandoned cars and dead bodies between Gatroon and Agadez. The drivers see a lot of stranded

and dead people. And we even don't have the means to bury them. We really would like to have a cemetery for them in the Gatroon area.

**Ibrahim Manzo Diallo:**

From your observations, do you think the Niger government accepts to become the accomplice of the European Union and agrees to send all the African migrants back to their countries?

**Mohamed Mena:**

We have heard that there is an accord or pressure from the European Union to prevent Africans from crossing inter-african frontiers. But, Niger is member of CEDEAO or ECOWAS in English and there is the policy of free movement in the ECOWAS region. Actually, I think that Niger has broken the agreement as they have introduced laws and check-points that prevent the movement of the refugees, travellers and migrants beyond Agadez towards the North of Niger and towards us in Libya. UNHCR has established a centre in Niger as a result of the request and pressure of the European Union to settle and stop all the African refugees who want to demand asylum. There are also detention centers established upon request and by pressure of the European Union, to bring African refugees back to their countries.

I am sorry, but we must be ashamed of our countries, of our leaders who are filling their pockets with the European money and closing the borders in return.

I think that this is an explicit and dangerous violation of the human rights and the international conventions on freedom of movement and I think that the Niger government is part of it. Unfortunately, the governments in Niger and Libya or any other African country, they obtain money from the European countries, and the latter put pressure on them. These governments don't care about human rights, they just take the money and do what the European Union or European countries request from them. I am sorry, but we must be ashamed of our countries, of our leaders who are filling their pockets with the European money and closing the borders in return.



**Mohammed Mena** is the chairman of Gatroon Center of Human Rights. He presents himself as activist of human rights especially in minority and migrants' rights. In 2017/2018 he took part of an exchange program by IFA and worked as an intern in the borderline-europe office in Berlin.

# The root causes of migration are based on unfair deals between Europe and Africa

by **Bruno Watara**

At present, we are facing a new historical era and witnessing a huge crime against humanity. Europe with its long brutal history of colonialism and human rights violations is once again showing its real face. Who wants to tell us that Europe didn't see these mass escapes and migration movements coming? Hunger and poor economical perspectives in the countries of origin are the reasons for labor migration. And what about the climate change and people fleeing for this reason? Who is responsible for this climate change? Definitely not the people who are on the run. We need to take a closer look at the history of Europe and Africa. Colonization started with unfair deals. Even before the independence of most African states, agreements with the former colonizing European states had been signed. As examples we can quote the agreements of Jaundé, Lomé I, II, III, IV or Benin. These agreements were designed to continue the European exploitation of Africa. These agreements were not signed

on a level playing field, as a balanced partnership of equals. Power hierarchies forced African States to sign agreements that are not attractive and promising or giving the population a chance to prosper.

The agreements concerning migration and border controls signed today, like the Rabat, Valetta or Khartoum Process, are a continuation of this process. African leaders are signing agreements with European States or the European Union that are not good for their populations. Often the money received for migration control ends up in the pockets of the presidents. The population neither knows which agreements have been signed nor is informed about the consequences. Europe is putting a lot of pressure on the African States to sign these agreements. And, at the same time, Europe is not ashamed to sign agreements with dictators to stop migration. Just have a look who is going to take the lead of the Khartoum process from 2019 on? Eritrea, a

**Bruno Watara**

is a long-time activist is a long-time activist fiercely criticizing the German asylum system. Today he is fighting against the European border regime with "Initiative gegen das EU- Grenzregime" in Berlin.



## Preface:

by **Andrea Stäritz & Julia Stier**

### Countering the Media Discourse

Currently, the general media discourse on migration through the desert is depicting migrants as victims of traffickers or as naïve illiterates. Anti-trafficking agencies are talking about 40 million victims of trafficking and at the same time the criminalisation of migration is going on. The IOM's campaign, in the aftermath of the "discovery" of slave trade in Libya, and its so-called voluntary return program has given the business of deportation a positive reputation and a humanitarian face. From Berlin to Niamey there is a consensus that migrants should return to their home countries. At the same time, critical reports of the militarization of border control are rare and the business of technical solutions for border control is underreported in the European and German media. Huge investments into border security are not worth an article. The data collection of travellers, migrants and refugees by Identity Providers (IdP) and also by humanitarian organisations is happening unnoticed or, at least, with the silent agreement that data privacy is not an issue for people on the run.

### Solidarity with Migrants in Transition

First steps are made for creating an Alarm Phone Sahara Network to support migrants and refugees in distress in the desert. In the Mediterranean many NGOs are already active in the rescue of people in distress but they are confronted with a growing criminalization of their work. Any kind of support is important for these organizations that saving human lives and that are at the same documenting the consequences of the EU border and migration politics.

**Stay informed about the EU border and migration politics!**

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the people that are documenting, informing and publishing on the situation at the externalized EU borders. Continue your very important work!

We are also thanking Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for the cooperation and their support through which we were able to organize the conferences on the Externalization of the EU border regime on the African continent in 2017 and 2018.

### About Us



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This publication was realized with funds of Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin.