

## **Inhuman and degrading treatment of black Africans in Tunisia, the outcome of institutional racism and the offshoring of European immigration policies**

The undersigned organizations deeply express their concern and outrage regarding the pernicious situation in Tunisia, particularly these last days in Sfax, the main coastal city of the south. Since the death of a Tunisian national presumably during a scuffle<sup>1</sup> with some sub-Saharan nationals on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2023, Sfax has become the theater of confrontation between an overheated segment of the population out of the hate campaign on social media and targeted exiles from sub-Saharan Africa who happened to stay in this city. This adds to the critical racist and xenophobic events that took place in March 2023<sup>2</sup> when three sub-Saharan immigrants were killed.

The hate and racist speech - a real “push for crime”- uttered by the Tunisian President in February 2023<sup>3</sup> triggered these extortions and gave a blank cheque to the severe violence against exiles. This was occasioned by the local authorities’ attitude, allowing fake news to persist on social media and by the violent behaviour of some groups - policemen, military men, and others from the population - vis à vis black exiles systematically attacked and violated with total impunity.<sup>4</sup>

Several testimonies especially those of the main people concerned: organizations of the civil society and foreign media estimate that serious violations of human rights are perpetrated: arbitrary and violent arrests, committing crime and suicide, physical aggression and stabbing...

These actors denounce a genuine migrants’ hunt and roundups followed by the return of thousands of persons to borders with Algeria and Libya. The Tunisian authorities are likely aiming to gather these sub-Saharan exiles at the frontiers helpless without any assistance and without any means to survive including asylum seekers. Roundups and arbitrary expulsions from their lodgings, destruction or property thefts, inhuman and degrading treatment as well as physical violence took place.<sup>5</sup>

Violations of human rights are being committed by public authorities and/or private militia widely documented but the perpetrators are not yet convicted neither by the courts nor by the state authorities.

All this is happening within a context of an unprecedented crisis in Tunisia affecting all levels: economic, social, political, institutional, financial, etc., a crisis deepened by pressure and haggling from the European Union (EU), which intends to impose on Tunisia the outsourcing of border controls and migration management via a “strengthened” but unequal partnership on migration.<sup>6</sup>

This repressive policy involves the expulsion from European countries of all exiles with no right of residence who have transited through Tunisia, which is designated as a “safe country”, unlike Libya.

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<sup>1</sup>“In Sfax, Death of a Tunisian during clashes with migrants arises violence fears.” 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023, France24, <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20230705-%C3%A0-sfax-la-mort-d-un-tunisien-lors-de-heurts-avec-des-migrants-fait-craindre-des-violences>

<sup>2</sup>“Tunisia, racist violence targets black migrants and refugees”, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2023/03/10/tunisie-la-violence-raciste-cible-les-migrants-et-refugies-noirs>

<sup>3</sup>“Tunisia, the racist speech of the president triggers a wave of violence against black Africans”, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2023/03/tunisia-presidents-racist-speech-incites-a-wave-of-violence-against-black-africans/>

<sup>4</sup> “Tunisia, in Sfax, sub-Saharan exiles undergo the violence of the population, France Info 7<sup>th</sup> July 2023, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/tunisie/tunisie-a-sfax-les-exiles-subahariens-subissent-la-violence-de-la-population\\_5936150.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/tunisie/tunisie-a-sfax-les-exiles-subahariens-subissent-la-violence-de-la-population_5936150.html)

<sup>5</sup>Human Rights Watch condemns the expulsion of migrants to the Tunisian desert. “It is a question of life or death.” 8<sup>th</sup> July 2023, Human Rights Watch, <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/human-rights-watch-denonce-des-expulsions-de-migrants-vers-le-desert-en-tunisie-cest-une>

<sup>6</sup>Why is the EU considering reinforcing its partnership with Tunisia? 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023, L’Express & AFP : <https://www.lexpress.fr/monde/pourquoi-lue-veut-renforcer-son-partenariat-avec-la-tunisie-5KUG3YXCSNCWFF25QW53IXRV5E/>

The reason for this is to make Tunisia the EU's border guard, responsible for containing "undesirable" migration and keeping it as far away from European territory as possible, in exchange for substantial and timely financial aid (at least € 900,000).

All this is taking place despite worries arising from the imperious deviation of power noticed in Tunisia<sup>7</sup> and in defiance of the rule of law and the fundamental rights of exiles in Tunisia.

This crisis is also aggravated by the ambiguity of the Algerian authorities who are exploiting the migration issue for political reasons by diverting people of sub-Saharan origin from Algeria - which has land borders with sub-Saharan African countries - to Tunisia which does not.

We express our full solidarity with all the victims of violence, whatever their nationality; we condemn this racist violence, wherever it originates, and express our indignation at the deafening and complicit silence of the Tunisian authorities.

We call on Tunisia to assume its responsibilities by protecting the exiles on its territory from all acts of violence, by putting an end to this racist violence and to the illegal deportations at Tunisia's borders, and to comply with international law.

Finally, we denounce in the strongest terms the pressure exerted by the EU on Tunisia in the context of unequal and bargained-for cooperation for the purpose of imposing its ultra-secure immigration and asylum policy on this Mediterranean country, in defiance of international law and the rights of exiles.

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<sup>7</sup> "In Tunisia, Kaïs Saïed is alone against all", 18<sup>th</sup> June 2022, Courrier international : <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/analyse-en-tunisie-kais-saied-est-seul-contre-tous>