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ESCAPE FROM TRIPOLI

REPORT ON THE CONDITIONS OF MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT IN LIBYA

The deaths in the desert and in the Channel of Sicily, the tortures and rapes in detention centres funded by Italy, deportations to the Sahara, collective refoulements, the repatriation of refugees on flights paid by Rome, deportations from Lampedusa, murders in police stations, the abuses perpetrated by *passeurs* and racist attacks in Tripoli. Everything that must not be known about the country to which Italy and the EU entrust the control of the southern border, on the eve of Frontex patrol operations in Libya in 2008, when refoulements at sea will become the norm



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REPORT ON THE CONDITIONS OF MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT IN LIBYA

ROME – In the first nine months of 2007, 12,753 migrants have arrived in Sicily on makeshift boats, 20% less compared to the first nine months of 2006. In the same period, 1,396 migrants have disembarked in Sardinia proceeding from Algeria, and around a thousand in Calabria from Turkey and Egypt. From January to September 2007, 1,552 people have arrived in Malta, a clear increase compared to the 1,024 who reached the island in the whole of 2006. Apart from the landings in Calabria and Sardinia, the majority of the migrants who disembarked in Malta and Sicily had set off from the western Libyan coasts, between Zuwarah and Misratah. However, among the 21,400 who landed in Sicily throughout 2006, there were only 50 Libyans. Libya is merely a transit country. The leading nationalities are Moroccan (8,146), Egyptian (4,200), Eritrean (2,859) and Tunisian (2,288). Economic migrants and refugees arrive together. Around 60% of the 10,438 who have sought asylum in Italy came precisely from the sea. The route across the Channel of Sicily is a dangerous one that, since 1998, has resulted in at least 2,432 victims, according to the international press review produced by *Fortress Europe*, 1,503 of whom have disappeared on the seabeds. The number of victims is increasing in spite of a decrease in arrivals. There have already been 502 deaths in the first nine months of 2007, whereas they had been 302 for the whole of 2006. They travel on smaller boats (with an average of 41 people on board, compared with 101 in 2005), entrusted directly to the passengers, who often have no experience at sea, to drive them. Cases in which fishing boats and merchant ships fail to provide assistance are becoming more frequent, according to the accounts given by shipwreck victims. But the true reason for the increase in the number of deaths is the change in the routes followed by migrants: they are becoming ever longer and move further into the high seas and are hence more dangerous, in order to avoid patrols or refoulements at sea.

Italy and the European Union are intensifying their relations with Libya in order to counter “illegal” immigration by sea, which accounts for around 8% of illegal immigration, according to the interior ministry. The plan, that has already been announced by Franco Frattini, the European Commissioner for justice, freedom and security, is to move the aero-naval patrols into Libyan waters from 2008 onwards, under the auspices of Frontex, the European agency for the control of external borders. The declared goal is the readmission in Libya of all the migrants who will be intercepted at sea. Libya appears to agree with this. Already on 25 May 2007, the executive deputy director of Frontex, Gil Arias, sent an official letter to Rammadan Ahmed Barq, the director of the Libyan Department for affairs with Europe, inviting Libya to co-operate with European patrols. Frontex has already deployed two missions in the Channel of Sicily. Nautilus I (from 5 to 15 October 2006 with the participation of Italy, Malta, France, Greece and Germany) and Nautilus II (from 25 June 2007 to 27 July 2007, and again from 10 September 2007 to 14 October 2007, with the participation of Italy, Malta, France, Greece, Germany, Portugal and Spain). The vice-president of the European Commission, Franco Frattini, has guaranteed that the joint patrols will re-start from 2008 on a permanent basis and with the participation, precisely, of Libya. Meanwhile, the budget of Frontex for 2008 has been doubled to 70 million Euros, up from 34 in 2007. And the European Union has offered Libya the installation of an electronic surveillance system along its southern border. The Libyan authorities have already submitted to Frontex a detailed list of the means they ask for in May 2007: 12 reconnaissance aircraft, 14 helicopters, 240 off-road vehicles, 86 lorries, 80 pick-ups, 70 buses, 28 ambulances, 12 radar systems, ten ships, 28 patrol boats, 100 rubber dinghies, 400 night-time viewers, 14 fingerprint scanning systems, as well as radio stations and satellite navigation systems.

Thousands of undocumented migrants and refugees cross the southern Libyan border every year, some of whom then continue their journey towards Italy. The testimonies featured in this report report the serious crimes committed by the *passeurs* (those who organise the journeys and allow people to “cross” the border) and Libyan law enforcement bodies alike. Abuses, harassment, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, detentions without trial in degrading conditions, torture, physical and sexual violence, the repatriation of refugees and deportations to the middle of the desert. Crimes that the European

Union pretends not to see since the moment when it authorised the refoulement of migrants to Libya by means of the Frontex patrols, when, as recently as May 2005, the European Court of Human Rights had forbidden collective refoulements from Lampedusa to Tripoli. And although, on the basis of article four of the 4th protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights, “the collective expulsion of foreigners is forbidden”.

The first official complaint concerning the condition of migrants in Libya dates back to December 2004, when the report of the European Union’s technical mission to Libya was published. It reported the arbitrary arrest of foreigners, abuses, collective deportations and the failure to recognise the right to asylum. In Tripoli, Italy and the European Union sought an ally for their own war against illegal immigration. The game was played on the same table as Libya’s international rehabilitation and the export of hydrocarbons. It suffices to re-read the statements issued in those days.

On 8 October 2004, Tripoli claimed that, just in the month of September, it had deported around 5,000 immigrants to the desert in Niger. On the same day, a methane pipeline between Mellitah and Gela (Sicily) was inaugurated. The then prime minister Silvio Berlusconi declared: “Mu’ammar Qaddafi is a great friend of mine and of Italy, he is a leader of freedom. I am proud that Italy is the leading country in terms of imports and exports with Libya”. Three days later, on 11 October 2004, the European Union withdrew its embargo against Tripoli, as had been announced some time earlier. The criticism in the report surfaced two months later, but was soon to be forgotten, buried under the discourse of diplomacy. Meanwhile, the abuses of authority continued and grew worse, as the repression increased. In September and November 2006, two independent studies by *Afvic* and *Human Rights Watch* confirmed the seriousness of the situation experienced by migrants in Libia: round-ups, arbitrary arrests, instances of torture and mass deportations continued.

Throughout the 1990s, colonel Mu’ammar Qaddafi had opened up the gates of the Jamahiriya, first to the citizens of the Arab world, and later to those of the whole of Africa, in the name of African solidarity. Over a decade, the 5.5 million Libyans were joined by almost two million foreigners, two thirds of whom did not have residence documents. At a similar pace, social tensions and small-scale crime were growing. And the Libyans’ discontent was hurled against African migrants, dragged by the rhetoric of racism. In September 2000, in Zawiyah, three days of racist clashes led to the spilling of the blood of at least 560 foreigners who were killed. On 24 September, a group of around fifty Libyan youths, shouting “blacks out”, attacked a camp of workers from Sudan and Chad, killing 50 of them. On the next day, over one thousand people set a camp where the Ghanaian community resided at the gates of the city alight. Ten Ghanaians died, charred. But it was the Nigerians who were struck the hardest. On 6 October, there were at least 500 victims from among the English-speaking community. All of this happened in the midst of indifference from the police, whose only response was to commence mass deportations. Thousands of people were loaded onto military lorries and abandoned along the 4,400 kilometres of the desert frontier region, bordering with Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Egypt and Sudan. They were at least 14,000 from 1998 to 2003. Men, women and children. Detained without trial, fed bread and water for months, without any distinction made between workers and political refugees. The deportations cost hundreds of people, who were sent to die in the middle of the desert, their lives. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stood by and looked. In the meantime, Italy laid the foundations for its secret agreements.

In 2003, the Berlusconi government, acting ahead of the calling off of international sanctions against Libya, sealed a secret agreement with Qaddafi to counter illegal immigration. It was an agreement that effectively suspended the embargo on military equipment for the fight against emigration, in the wake of Tripoli’s commitment to pay millions’ worth of compensation to the families of the 440 victims of the terrorist attacks on flights Pan Am 103 and Uta 722 in 1988 and 1989. Rome sent over 100 rubber dinghies, six off-road vehicles, three buses, 40 night-time viewers, 50 underwater

cameras, 500 wetsuits, 150 binoculars, 12,000 woolen blankets, 6,000 mattresses and pillows, 50 satellite navigation systems, 1,000 field tents and 500 lifejackets. But also 1,000 body bags.

The covers and mattresses are needed by the detention centres for migrants that were established throughout the country. According to testimonies collected in this report, there are at least 20 of them: in Ajdabiya, Binghazi, Ghat, Gharyan, Ghudamis, aj-Jmayl, Juwazat, Khums, Kufrah, Marj, Misratah, Qatrun, Sabratah, Sabha, Sirt, Surman, Tripoli, (at least two centres: Janzur and Fellah), Zawiyah, Zuwarah (*see the map in the appendix*). They are not always real prisons. They are often old warehouses fitted out for the purpose of detention and guarded by police. The testimonies gathered refer to arrests at sea, en route to Sicily, but also of police raids in camps and in the *squats* inhabited by immigrants, rather than in the buildings along the coast in which the *passeurs* hide them on the day of their departure. The accounts talk of detentions that have lasted months and, in some cases, years, without any trial, in overcrowded conditions with up to 60 or 70 people in cells measuring six metres by eight with a single toilet. The women are systematically victims of sexual violence by the police, as is documented in a chapter of the report dedicated to gender violence. And the men are often subjected to beatings, both at the time of arrest and during detention, for the pettiest reasons. The testimonies also tell of three revolts by the detained migrants, in Tripoli, Kufrah and Khums, which ended, in the first case with two Nigerians killed by the bullets fired into a cell by the police, in the second one with 70 detainees struck with truncheons and kicked, and a boy knifed by an officer, and in the third case with electric shocks. In fact, special truncheons that are capable of discharging electric shocks are part of the Libyan police's equipment, at least in Khums and Misratah. The effects of the discharges last for days, causing temporary blindness and swelling of the face.

According to the report by the European mission in Libya (2004), three of these centres were funded by Italy. One of them in 2003, in the north of the country. Two others in 2004 and 2005. Article one point 544 of the budget law for 2005 earmarked 23 million Euros for 2005 and 20 million for 2006 to provide "financial and technical assistance in the field of migratory and refugee flows, as well as to continue interventions aimed at establishing appropriate structures in the countries ascertained as being a source of illegal immigration flows". Money that has ended up in Sabha and Kufrah, but which, according to recent claims by the interior ministry undersecretary Marcella Lucidi, were used to build a training centre for the police in Sabha and a health centre in Kufrah.

Once arrested, the migrants have four options. Those who have money manage to bribe the police to get out. And it is often the police itself that puts them in touch with some *passeurs* who can take them back to Tripoli. Those who don't have any money are returned by aeroplane to their country of origin, or loaded into military lorries, crammed with 70-80 people, and carried towards the southern border: to Kufrah, in the southeast, or to Qatrun, in the southwest. Then, from there and after more months spent in detention, the lorries laden with migrants set off for the border, in the middle of the desert. Those who don't have any money are abandoned in the sand, those who can pay 100 or 200 dollars are taken back, illegally, by the police itself. The fourth option is a kidnapping, practiced especially in Kufrah. Local Libyan citizens buy the freedom of some migrant detainees by bribing the police, and then keep them as hostages in their house until they pay a ransom themselves, or through a *Western Union* money order sent by their relatives abroad.

Official figures indicate that between 1998 and 2003, over 14,500 people have been abandoned in mid-desert along the Libyan border with Niger, Chad, Sudan and Egypt. Many deportees have lost their lives after being abandoned in the desert. The European Parliament, that approved a resolution on 14 April 2005 that asked Italy to block the collective expulsions of migrants to Libya, informed - citing Libyan sources - of the death of 106 migrants abandoned by Libya on its southern desert frontier. Only in the region of Ghat, along the border with Algeria, there were 4,275 arrests in 2006, and there had already been 2,450 in the first five months of 2007, according to a Frontex report.

Today, however, the majority expulsions from Libya are carried out by aeroplane and the repatriation figures have risen ten-fold. 198,000 foreigners have been expelled from 2003 to 2006. The data is official. 53,842 expulsions in 2006, 47,991 in 2005, 54,000 in 2004 and 43,000 in 2003. And the latest figures cited in a Frontex report to the European Commission talk of 60,000 migrants detained in Libya in May 2007. As many as the Italian prison population, three times more than the estimated 22,000 migrants held in the temporary detention centres in Italy in 2006. In 2003, 38% of those expelled were Egyptians, 15% Nigerians, 12% Sudanese, 11% Ghanaians and 10% from Niger, followed by Moroccans, Malians, Eritreans, Somalis, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. Since 2003, many deportations take place by air, even on cargo flights. In 2005, Libya has spent \$2,935,000 on repatriations. At present, we don't know whether Italy has taken part in this expenditure, and to what extent. What is known, is that the Italian government paid, from 16 August 2003 to December 2004, for 47 flights by Air Libya Tibesti and Buraq Air that have repatriated 5,524 migrants, four fifths of whom were sent back to Egypt, Ghana and Nigeria, and the rest of them to Mali, Pakistan, Niger, Bangladesh and Syria. But also 55 to Sudan and 109 to Eritrea, that is, 164 potential political refugees deported to countries at war contravening every international convention on the right of asylum with the *silence / assent* of UNHCR. The 109 Eritreans were repatriated on 21 July 2004 on an Air Libia Tibesti flight and are reportedly still in detention in Eritrea. Another flight that left a few weeks later, on 27 August 2004, was hijacked to land in Sudan by the 75 Eritrean passengers, who included six children. Sixty of them were later recognised as political refugees by UNHCR in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum.

But the life of migrants in Libya is already in danger long before the possible expulsions, during the journeys across the desert to enter the country and reach the Mediterranean. The trans-Saharan paths are strewn with the skeletons of "illegals". The Sahara is an unavoidable passageway. It is more dangerous than the sea. The great desert separates West Africa and the Horn of Africa from the Mediterranean. It is crossed in lorries and off-road vehicles leaving from Sudan, Chad and Niger. According to the international press review prepared by Fortress Europe, from 1996, at least 1,579 people have lost their lives during the crossing. However, they may be many more. According to testimonies from survivors, almost every journey has to count its dead. On 19 June 2003, the Ghanaian ambassador in Tripoli, George Kumi, spoke of 200 fellow Ghanaians who were found dead on the border with Niger, just in the first semester of 2006.

In Niger, the tarmac ends in Agadez and starts again after 1,100 kilometres of paths, via Dirkou, at the doors of Qatrun oasis in Libya. From there, Tripoli is one day's travel away. The cars heading for the Sahara leave from Agadez and Dirkou. Mercedes 6x6 lorries or Toyota off-road vehicles. The authorities are well informed and the Niger police lives by extorting money every time the "illegals" pass. Here, a monthly wage comes close to 50 Euros, but the turnover for "illegal emigration" in the Sahara, between extortion and looting raids, is worth up to 20 million Euros per year. Money that is pocketed by *passeurs* and military personnel. The "illegals" are squeezed until the end. And whoever ends up broke is a dead man. Hundreds, if not thousands, live stuck in the oases of Dirkou and Madama. They are the *touareg's* new slaves. Boys and girls work day and night for a fistful of rice and a few cents.

Life in the desert hangs by a thread. If the engine breaks down, the car gets covered with sand, or the driver decides to abandon his passengers and head back on his own, it's over. Within a radius of hundreds of kilometres, there is nothing but sand. They die like flies every month, but the news only get through with difficulty. 29 May 2005: 11 die of thirst after the engine jams 600 kilometres away from Agadez. 8 October 2004: 12 dead and 50 injured in an accident involving a Libyan army lorry heading for Niger with a load of deportees. 2 June 2002: 45 die of thirst in the Sudanese desert. 18 September 2001: 52 deaths on the paths to Tamanrasset. 18 May 2001: 140 deaths in the Libyan desert to the south of Murzuq. The list continues, reaching a figure of 1,069 victims. In 2005, the association "*Sudanese*

Popular Congress” indicated that the number of Sudanese who had died in the desert and had been buried in Kufrah was 486.

The abuses to which “illegals” are subjected begin among the dunes and continue until Tripoli, in a climate of complete impunity. The migrants are repeatedly cadged by drivers who they pay for the journey to Tripoli once they have reached Libya through the southern border. The drivers collect the money in advance and then leave them half-way. And the migrants are often also mistreated once they arrive in Tripoli, even in the middle of the street. They are often stopped by children and adolescents, who ask them for money. Those who pay are left in peace, those who refuse to are attacked by gangs, beaten, and sometimes stabbed, or even killed. And others who also ended up dead, were some migrants stopped by the police and killed in unclear circumstances while they were held in custody in police stations, according to accounts provided in some testimonies.

The same treatment is reserved to the *harragas* (literally: those who “burn” the border) from Egypt and Morocco. A Moroccan man was even beaten, tortured, burned and thrown into the sea by the *passeurs* themselves on the night of departure, within a climate of widespread impunity and blatant connivance between the mafias of *passeurs* and the Libyan authorities. A connivance that is confirmed by the fact that none of the migrants interviewed has ever been interrogated, after their arrest, to get to the name of the organisers of their journey. The Moroccan one was the leading nationality in 2006 among the migrants who disembarked in Sicily: 8,146 out of 21,400. In 2005, they had only been 3,624, outnumbered by the 10,201 Egyptians. In 2005, over 2,500 Moroccans were arrested in Libya and expelled to Casablanca. And in December 2006, government sources in Rabat spoke of 763 detainees in Tripoli who were ready to be repatriated. Arrested on the border, in airports and during round-ups in Tripoli and Zuwarah, a list of the detainees was sent by the police authorities to the Moroccan consulate which, in turn, informed their families. An apparently simple communication chain, but which can take several months before something is known in their homes about a disappeared son, in a telephone call announcing their departure by sea on the next day. Those who succeed in hiding some money on them before the search manage to call home. The others, who are stripped of everything, are completely isolated. Once they have contacted their relatives, it is the latter who buy their return tickets and fax them to the consulate requesting the release of their sons, brothers, husbands. But it doesn't always work.

This is the Libya that arrests, tortures and deports thousands of young *harragas*, and protects the smugglers' mafias, whose turnover may be estimated at around 100 million Euro per year. And this is no secret. The first official claims in the report of the European Union's technical mission in Libya came in December 2004. Thus, Italy knew what it was financing in Kufrah and Sabha in 2004 and 2005. Italy was aware of the presence of asylum seekers among the 166 passengers expelled from Libya on the charter flights paid by Rome heading to Sudan and Eritrea. Italy knew the fate to which it was sending the 1,876 youths, mainly Egyptians, who landed in Lampedusa and were deported by aeroplane to Tripoli in October 2004 and March 2005, before the European Court of Human Rights deemed the collective deportations to Libya illegal, in May 2005.

But the end justifies the means and Libya's war against illegal immigration is indispensable. Through the mere accounting of arrivals in boats, the number of arrests in Libya and expulsions, these can only be welcomed as “positive fruits” of police cooperation with Libya by the Italian interior minister Giuliano Amato.

Since February 2007, Libya has established a regime of entry visas (with the exception of Egypt and Tunisia) and has set up, within the interior ministry, the “Agency for the security of borders”, the “Coast Guard” – which, however, is only equipped with 12 dinghies and 12 patrol boats to cover 2,000 km of coastline – and the “Department against illegal immigration”. In 2006, 357 *passeurs* were arrested, 284 of whom were Libyan. According to the report of the EU's second technical mission in Libya,

conducted by Frontex between 28 May and 5 June 2007, in 2006 the Libyan authorities confiscated 51 cars, 17 boats and 36 satellite telephones. In the same period, the corpses of 360 migrants were also recovered. The document does not specify whether they died at sea or in the desert. This is not the only detail that the agency overlooks. In fact, Frontex does not say anything about the forms of arrest, on their validation, on the length of detention, on the nationality of the repatriated people and on conditions in prisons.

In February 2007, Libya presented the *harragas* with an *ultimatum*: leave the country within a month. In order to land in Tripoli, since the first of March, an entry visa is also required by all the citizens of Arab and African countries. 2007 promises to be the year of the manhunt for Libya. From the first of January to 17 February, 3,747 foreigners have been arrested and, from September 2006 to February, the deportations have been as many as 8,336. And 2,137 irregular migrants have been arrested in the month of May 2007, and a further 1,500 in June. And in May 2007, according to the Frontex report, the migrants detained in Libya were at least 60,000. It is a sign that the Euro-African conference on immigration held in Tripoli in November 2006 is bearing its fruits. But also its collateral effects, like the 600 Eritrean asylum seekers detained in Misratah since a year and six months ago, who are in danger of being repatriated. They were arrested en route to Sicily by the Libyan coast guards or in the street during police round-ups. Among them, there are around a hundred women and fifty children. Some women were raped by police officers during the first weeks of detention. Two pregnant women have given birth in the prison. Another five women are pregnant and will soon give birth to their babies. The centre is overcrowded, the detainees are not given any medical care, in spite of many cases of scabies and dermatitis, and in some cases, of tuberculosis and nervous breakdowns. Among the detainees, there are also 114 refugees who have been recognised as such by UNHCR in Ethiopia and Sudan. A further 49 women have been recognised as refugees by UNHCR in Tripoli, which has interviewed the detained women and is now looking for countries that are available for their resettlement, one of which may be Italy, which has reportedly offered to receive 36 of them. The others will probably be repatriated. Almost all of them are deserters from the Eritrean army, that is at war with Ethiopia. If they are repatriated, they risk suffering the same fate as the 161 Eritrean deserters who were executed by firing squad in June 2005, according to Amnesty International.

The Eritrean government has been accused of serious human rights violations by *Amnesty International*, *Human Rights Watch*, *Reporters sans Frontières*, the United Nations, apart from the European Union itself. In spite of the pact of non-belligerence signed jointly by Eritrea and Ethiopia in Algiers in 2000, the state of war has effectively continued since 1998. Boys and girls, once they come of age, are forced into indefinite conscription in the armed forces and deserters are punished through imprisonment. In recent months, the Eritrean police is carrying out arrests in Asmara of relatives of youths who have fled the army. The families are forced to pay considerable sums to avoid imprisonment. Moreover, journalists, conscientious objectors, political figures and religious leaders are persecuted. This is a fate that the 2,589 Eritreans who have disembarked along the Sicilian coast in 2006 have avoided. They account for 12% of the 22,016 foreign citizens who landed in Italy last year, and 20.8% of the 10,438 asylum seekers from the same period. Libya has already deported Eritreans, in 2006, and earlier still, in 2004, on different occasions, including on a flight paid for by Italy. In 2002, Malta repatriated 223 Eritreans. Today, they are still detained in the high-security prison of Dahlak Kebir, and many of them have been killed.

If EU Commissioner Franco Frattini's plan were to become operative already from 2008, with the participation of Libya in the European Frontex patrols in the Channel of Sicily and the refoulement in Libya of all the intercepted migrants, stories like the ones documented in this report will turn into the ordinary administration of the denial of rights, and of abuses tolerated by the European Union, which, in name of the war against illegal immigration, will send thousands of refugees to their deaths. But in reality, collective refoulements at sea are already practiced, in spite of being forbidden by international law. The testimonies collected speak of at least six refoulements, between 2005 and 2006, amounting to

a total of at least 600 people sent back to Libya. Ships that have been stopped by Italian, Maltese, Tunisian or Libyan authorities and escorted towards Libyan territorial waters before being handed over to the Libyan coast guard. More recently, it was a Spanish fishing boat, the “Corisco”, that brought back 50 migrants rescued in international waters, 80 miles north of the Libyan coast on 13 October 2007, to Tripoli. Four months earlier, another Spanish fishing boat, the “Santa Maria de Loreto”, had acted likewise with 51 shipwreck victims rescued in the high sea. And on 18 July 2007, on the other hand, a Tunisian fishing boat was hijacked by the migrants that it had rescued and taken on board. They sought to flee from a Tunisian patrol boat that was approaching and would have taken them to Tunisia in order to subsequently expel them to Libya, as effectively happened later, without UNHCR in Tunis being authorised to examine the cases of the 22 returned Somalis, Sudanese, Erithreans and Ethiopians, including 11 women and two girls who were six months and five years old, and without the name of the prison where they ended up once they were in Libya even being known.

But the refoulements also take place under the false cover as sea rescues. This was even admitted by the commanding officer of the “Vega” ship of the Italian military navy, Francesco Saladino, heard as a witness in the trial in Agrigento in which the case against seven Tunisian fishermen who face charges of assisting illegal immigration for taking 44 shipwreck victims to disembark in Lampedusa after rescuing them in the high sea off the island is being heard. According to Saladino’s evidence, on the past 8 August, a Tunisian military corvette of the *Combattente* type, rescued a vessel in distress carrying migrants 34 miles to the south of Lampedusa and accompanied them back towards the Tunisian coasts. Cases such as these are frequent, and they are co-ordinated by the “*Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centers*” (Mrcc) in Tunis, Rome, Valletta and Tripoli, which share the interventions among each other depending on the location of the ships and the availability of means of rescue. They are treated as rescue operations but, in fact, they contravene international human rights conventions. The SAR Convention on rescue at sea itself, states the duty to carry shipwreck victims to the safest port, not the closest one and, in the case of third country nationals, it cannot be any port in Tunisia or Libya under any circumstances, where the systematic arbitrary detention of repatriated migrants in degrading conditions has been documented. Expulsion to third countries where a person is at risk of suffering inhuman or degrading treatment is also forbidden by the United Nations Convention against Torture and the European Charter of Human Rights. Without referring to the expulsion of refugees to unsafe third countries, forbidden by the Geneva Convention and by the African Union Convention on Refugees. Today, Tunisia and Libya are unable to protect refugees, and the testimonies featured in this report demonstrate the inability of UNHCR to guarantee the right to asylum in these countries, although the High Commissioner’s office has delegations in Tunis and Tripoli.

Another chapter concerns the denial of assistance and the criminalisation of rescues at sea. Figures from the Italian coast guard speak clearly: 44% of the 560 rescue interventions at sea carried out in the first six months of 2007 by the coast guard have been conducted in sar (*search and rescue*) waters for which Malta is competent, “many of which started in the Libyan area”, as can be read in a note sent to the foreign ministry by the coast guard in the month of October 2007. There have been three rescues in Libyan sar waters between June and September, a further three in Tunisian sar waters and two in Algerian sar waters. The Italian coast guard complains about the lack of means and the scarce co-operation offered by Libyan and Maltese authorities. Malta has a sar area that is as large as Great Britain, too ample to be patrolled with its own means. However, Malta is unwilling to give up even a single centimetre of its sar waters because a fir (*flight information region*) space corresponds to the sar area, which yields an income to the small state for the right of passage for every aeroplane that flies over the area, which Valletta does not intend to forfeit. As for the absence of action by Libya, it would suffice to remember the tragic disappearance of at least three boats with 107 passengers on board this summer. They were intercepted after their first call for aid and were never found again by the time when assistance belatedly arrived. On 28 July 2007, the traces of a vessel carrying 25 passengers were lost, and it probably sank in the stormy sea between Libya and Malta, after it had signalled being in distress, to no avail. On 11 June 2007, a boat with 25 passengers on board disappeared. Stuck in the stormy sea 47

miles away from the Libyan coast, it had issued a distress call some days earlier. An Iranian cargo ship that was 20 miles away from the shipwreck victims refused to rescue them, fearing that they may have been armed. Malta had asked Libya to intervene, but when Tripoli had sent a plane on a reconnaissance mission, two days later, there was no trace of the boat. Disappeared. Just like the 57 passengers photographed by a Maltese aeroplane on 22 May 2007, 88 miles to the south of Malta, which then sank while they fruitlessly waited for the arrival of assistance. A lack of rescues to which an ever decreasing effort by fishermen must be added. Witnesses have been reporting this for years. Half-sunk boats and fishing boats that go straight past them without stopping. Also because rescue, which is obligatory under conventions of international law of the sea, is liable to be punished as assisting illegal immigration. This is the case of seven Tunisian fishermen on trial in Agrigento, arrested when they were caught in the act on the past 8 August after carrying 44 shipwreck victims who they had rescued 30 miles away from the island to disembark in Lampedusa. Released after a month spent in prison, they risk facing prison sentences of between four and 15 years.

All of this, the round-ups in Libya, the arbitrary arrests, the torture and deportations, cause people to take to the Mediterranean, even at the cost of dying, even at the cost of travelling with newborn babies with whom women who became pregnant during trips that have lasted for years have been arriving increasingly often over the last few years. "From Libya you don't go back home – says Abraham, from Eritrea -. Life in Tripoli is hell, but after having seen the desert and after having been to Kufrah, there's nothing left to do but continue. Europe is now only a few kilometres away and life no longer has any value.

With this report, Fortress Europe asks the European Union to suspend any form of co-operation with Libya to counter illegal immigration in the absence of guarantees on the respect for the human rights of the migrants who are arrested, tortured and expelled by Libya. And it also asks for it to intervene for the freeing of the thousands of migrants and political refugees who are detained in Libyan prisons as candidates for illegal emigration. Fortress Europe welcomes the three parliamentary written questions submitted in October to the European Council and Commission, and to the Italian interior and foreign ministries. It is very likely that the answers to these questions will not arrive before the end of 2007. In the meantime, Libya has actually been elected as a member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2008-09 two-year term on the past 16 October 2007. On the same day, Eni (the Italian state hydrocarbons company) and the Lybian state-run "National Oil Company" sealed a strategic agreement involving the renewal of existing concessions, the re-starting of exploratory activities and the development of gas production in Libya until 2047, with investments worth 28 billion dollars over 10 years. "The understanding that has been reached – writes Eni – consolidates the excellent relationship between the two Mediterranean countries". It is worth remembering that Eni is controlled by the state, which holds 38% of its shares. In short, it does not seem likely that, due to the Misratah affair, the Italian government may bring into question its good relations with Tripoli and the possibility of increasing the imports of gas arriving in Gela from Mellitah two-fold, from 8 to 16 billion cubic metres per year.

Rome, 25 October 2007, Gabriele Del Grande
(Translated by Yasha Maccanico)

THE WITNESSES

THE JOURNEYS IN THE DESERT

Charles, Ghana

“I crossed th Sahara from Niger in June 2007. Not far from the border post in Toumou, I saw the mummified bodies of 34 people with my own eyes. There wasn’t any trace of the car”.

Yakob, Ethiopia

“The problem is in Sudan. You pay 300 dollars and they tell you that they’ll take you to Libya. But the Sudanese drivers leave you at the border. From there, you continue in the Libyans’ off-road vehicles. And the Libyans want more money. You don’t have a choice because there are too many kilometres of desert. Those who pay continue and those who have more cash help the ones who are in trouble. If you don’t have money, they leave without you. For them, you are less that merchandise”

Daniel, Erithrea

“32 of us left from Khartoum, but 20 of us arrived in Kufrah. On the first day, eight of us died in an accident, crushed by the weight of the car. There was a nasty argument with the two Sudanese drivers. They wanted to take the gold rings of two women who died. We complained, we didn’t want them to touch the corpses. But there was nothing we could do about it. They were armed and knew the way. We covered them with a sheet of sand and left. On the next day, the drivers asked us for money. We had already paid 300 dollars each in Bahri. But the drivers also wanted their own profit. They asked for 150 dollars each. Four of us had nothing left in their pockets. And the rest of us didn’t have enough money to raise it between them. We left them in the middle of the desert and set off again. After a week’s journey, they told us we had arrived in Libya. They said that a lorry would have come a few hours later, not to worry, and they went away. The Libyans arrived three days later. Three days withstanding 50 degrees C, without water or covers for the night. One more day, and we would have all died of thirst”.

Zerit, Erithrea

“I entered Libya on 1 November 2002. We were in two off-road vehicles, around fifty people. The Sudanese driver left us in an oasis that was far from Kufrah, in the middle of the desert, telling us that a cousin of his would have come to continue the trip. At night, instead, a man armed with a sword appeared who demanded that we pay for our stay in his oasis. Then he wanted to go off with a girl from the group. She was very pretty, but was travelling with her husband. At the end of the negotiation, he agreed to leave the girl and was satisfied by obtaining 200 dollars from each of us. He said he would have taken us to Tripoli. Instead, he left us in a dilapidated house, outside the city, and soon afterwards the police showed up, shooting in the air and arresting all of us”.

Goitom, Erithrea

“We set off again from Kufrah towards Tripoli. But it’s difficult. Because every time, you pay and they tell you that they will take you to Tripoli, then a few hours later they leave you in the middle of nowhere and tell you that they’re going back, or they ask you to pay again to continue the journey. And you can’t do anything about it, because you pay before setting off and you can’t report them. Thus, before you reach the capital, they rip you off three or four times”.

Beyené, Erithrea

“I crossed the Sahara in 2004. There were around thirty of us on an off-road pick-up truck. Along the path, we found an abandoned car that was empty. Not far from there, were the skeletons of 32 people, half covered by the sand”.

“My cousin died during the crossing as well. He suffered from diabetes, he was a doctor, but the journey lasted longer than expected and he had finished his insulin. They had to leave him half-way”.

Abdu, Somalia

“There were 60 of them, at the sides of the path, close to the border. Sixty tombs. They had died during the trip and were probably buried under the sand by the people on the car that passed after them”.

Saba, Eritrea

“With my own eyes, I saw 44 of the 50 fellow travellers with whom we had left die. We spent two weeks in the middle of the desert, without water or food. The two Sudanese drivers had abandoned us in the desert. They said to wait, that two other cars would have come to continue the journey. But they only arrived two weeks later”.

Sennai, Eritrea

“At the time, I was only 17 years old. I had set off from Eritrea in 2004 with a dear friend of mine, Mussie. We were on two different off-road vehicles. Mussie travelled with his twenty-year-old sister. The driver had set his eyes on her straight away. On the first night he started bothering her, he took her away from the group and tried to rape her, and she started screaming. Mussie heard her and ran over to protect her. The driver was armed and stabbed him to death in the fight that followed. Afterwards, he took the girl with him again. We could have defended him, but we were in the middle of the desert and, without the driver, we would have never found the way.”

Menghistu, Ethiopia

First journey

“We travelled in the desert for five or six days until Kufrah. The water was in the drums and the Libyans distributed it once a day; they made us get out of the cars and lined us up and gave us a glass each once per day. When we reached Kufrah, the Libyans began shouting at us and beating us with sticks whenever something bothered them, they beat us whenever they had an opportunity to. When we were lined up, if someone slowed this down or moved out of line, they beat him with sticks, but we didn't have any strength left anymore and could not resist. In Libya, they held power. Those among us who spoke Arabic were beaten more often.

In Kufrah, we changed car and they put us into an old model of pick-up truck with a closed trailer. 18 of us got in, we sat down with our legs tight between our arms, we couldn't shift by a centimetre and the people cried and complained, we were only waiting for the moment when the wheels would sink in the sand so we had to get off to free them, so we could breathe for some minutes. We immediately learned the words 'get in and get out', because if you didn't understand these words they would beat you, saying: 'Animals, get out! Animals, get in!'.”

Second journey, after the arrest in Kufrah

“We left in the daytime, in the afternoon, and during the journey we changed cars four times. We stopped in Ajdabiya because a car had some problems, so they distributed the passengers between the other cars and we were tight and stood. During a break, I tried to hide and go into another car where there were less people, but a Libyan man saw me. I started running until he caught me and beat me with a stick. The Libyans don't just have sticks with them, but also daggers and swords, and they sometimes threaten you wielding a sword.

After Ajdabiya, during the last part of the journey, we were transferred from the pick-ups into a lorry covered by a canvas, there were sixty of us in all. They placed the women in front of a small window and they made us get in while we stood so that we would all fit and then with one word, 'gams!', they shouted at us to sit down; otherwise if we had all got in and sat down, all of us would never have fitted. I ended up without a place, standing. They started beating those who were standing on their heads to force them to sit down. After they had struck me with a stick a first time and I thought that they couldn't see me, I got up again, but from the outside they could see my head against the canvas, so another stick blow struck me on the nape of the neck.

There was a lot of tension in the lorry, there was a lack of air to breathe and you could feel that you were about to die, and the tension grew; I had a pen on me and I started to pierce the canvas, until I

caused it to rip, some air came in and everyone wanted to come to my side. At the end of the journey, when I looked at the canvas it was all pierced. We took turns to breathe, one at a time, you breathed in some air and then left your place to someone else, and this continued throughout the journey. There was a lad who felt sick and wanted to get out, rip the canvas, and he shouted, so we made a larger hole and placed him below it to let him breathe better.

Everyone was pushing because there wasn't any space, I was folded in half for the whole journey with the canvas pressing on my back, and in those moments you don't want anyone to touch you, everybody's nervous, there was a man who pinched me on the thighs to make me move, the holes make you bump against those beside you and when I touched him he would get angry, so we started punching each other, but at the end of the journey, when we arrived, we both apologised.

During the journey, we would drink hot water mixed with petrol. During a break to drink, when the Libyans saw that the canvas was all ripped, they started beating us.

With us, in the lorry, there was an older Ethiopian man who was called Mandela who, in Tripoli, was arrested for the third time and sent back to Kufrah two days after our arrival. When I met him again in Tripoli months later, he told me: "you know, I did this last trip like you: standing and with my back folded against the canvas". Mandela died later during the sea crossing. He died when I was already in Trapani [in Sicily]".

ABUSES SUFFERED IN THE STREET

Abraham, Eritrea

"I set off from Tripoli in July 2007. It is a city where it is impossible to live. On every street corner you meet people who ask you for money. They know you must leave for Italy and think that you have lots of money. If you don't pay up they attack you. Children, boys also ask you for money. And if you don't pay, you find yourself having to deal with the larger group of friends, and risk being beaten up right in the street for no reason or, even worse, being reported to the police".

Daniel, Eritrea

"If they attack you and you call the police, you're the one who is arrested. Against us, they are twice racist. We are black and Christian. I was walking with a friend, Goitom, in Tripoli, when a group of Libyan youths stopped us. They wanted to know what our names were. So we presented ourselves with Muslim names. I said I was called Muhammad and Goitom introduced himself as Mustafa. Then they asked us if we were Muslim. We said that we were, luckily we spoke Arabic well. Not convinced yet, they asked us to recite the Fatiha sura from Koran. I knew it, but Goitom remained silent. They let me go. I ran to hide behind a small wall. I heard shouting, they were beating him, they wanted money. Goitom had 900 dollars on him, they were meant for the journey. He tried to defend himself. But they stabbed him and took everything away from him. When they had left, he was already dead, in a pool of blood".

Abdu, Somalia

"In Tripoli, if you come across a Libyan on your same side of the pavement, he yells at you to walk on the other side of the street. They have no respect for any woman who is not Libyan. They only respect a woman if she's pregnant. I know a couple, and the police had entered their house at night during a round-up. They raped her with a truncheon in front of her husband, who was forced to watch. Then there's the problem of health. An undocumented foreigner in Libya, even if he was dying, would not muster the courage to go to a hospital".

Menghistu, Ethiopia

"In Tripoli, you are always tense because you only think that you may be arrested again and sent back to Kufrah. In time, this becomes a veritable obsession. Every day, the great problem was to go back home in a taxi, because almost all the taxi drivers in Tripoli are policemen, they tell you that they are taking you home and instead they call a friend who is in service who arrives in a police car and they steal your money. Luckily, this never happened to me; before boarding a taxi, I always spent almost ten minutes

before picking someone who did not seem a policeman to me, and if they asked me where I was from, I answered that I was a Somali, because they know that Ethiopians and Eritreans are there to leave for Italy and have lots of money on them, unlike Somalis who, moreover, are Muslim, like Libyans. Slowly, I learned some words of Arabic to be able to hold a conversation, I would speak about what I knew about Somalia and cursed the United States, so the driver would relax and I hoped that he wouldn't report me to the police. If you want to survive in Tripoli, you need to predict everything, everything must be done discreetly and carefully, you can never relax, you must never lose your concentration. Before leaving home, you must check if there are people on the street, and when we return we are not together, but do so one by one, you whisper when you speak and try not to look anyone in the eye, not even children. The children and youths that you meet in the street, sitting next to the shops, shout 'police, police' at you, then 'gib ruba', which is an order and means: 'come and give me a quarter of a dinar', and if you don't give it to them, they throw stones at you".

Anonymous 1, Eritrea

"The Libyans attack you in the street, they threaten you and sometimes call the police to get you arrested. I still have the scar from a stab wound inflicted on me by a Libyan boy in the street, because he wanted me to give him some money".

Wares, Eritrea

"The Libyan population is deeply racist and they call us 'haywan', which means 'animals', they threaten us in the street with pistols, they beat us up to steal our money. Nobody protects us".

ABUSES BY PASSEURS

Mohammad, Morocco

Mohammad shows two pictures of his son, Imad, 28 years old. In one of them he's smiling, interlocking arms with two friends on the seashore, on a beach in Casablanca. In the other, he is a naked corpse, purple, with a gunshot wound in the abdomen, the signs of a rope that had been tied to his thorax, a burnt leg and a bruised face.

"My son was tied, tortured, burned alive and thrown into the sea. He was killed by his *porteur*, Mohammad, the brother-in-law of Imad's sister, a resident in Italy. The last time I spoke to him on the phone, was on 22 March 2004. Two days later, on the night of the 24th, 57 people were forced to embark in spite of the stormy sea and torrential rain. Imad refused. The sea was not safe, he didn't want to die like that. They tortured and killed him. The body was recovered in the sea. I was able to see him in the hospital in Misratah, in Libya. I have shown this photograph to the Consul and the Ambassador of Morocco in Tripoli to demand the arrest of the killer. But the only effect of my complaint was the disappearance of the only evidence of the crime: my son's mangled body. Two months after my visit, when my wife showed up in the morgue, the body was no longer there, and we haven't heard anything about him since".

Tareke, Eritrea

"There were 264 of us. They took our pictures and asked us for our names. But none of us was ever interrogated. Neither when we were arrested, nor in the subsequent months in prison, no one ever asked me for the names of the organisers of the journey".

Anna, Eritrea

"Everything was ready for the departure, it was May of 2006. They had hidden us in a rudder along the coast. We had already paid the ticket, we had to wait for them to come to pick us up. Instead, the police came. They beat people left, right and centre. People fled. I managed to climb up a tree, with a six-month-old baby, and they didn't see me. I stayed there until the morning".

Menghistu, Ethiopia

“In the desert, on the border, the Sudanese drivers handed us over to the Libyans. We paid them three hundred dollars, they said that they would have taken us to Benghazi. After half an hour’s journey, we stopped in a place where there were some abandoned cabins. The Libyans positioned themselves away from us, in a cabin that was further along. On the second day, the Libyans told us to go with them to the well to fill the water cans. Almost all the youths went, while the three girls stayed with two other boys, one of whom was the boyfriend and the other a brother of one of the girls. The Libyans who had stayed back told the two boys to go get some wood, but they refused; they had understood that the Libyans wanted to abuse the girls. They had an argument and told us about it when we returned. At night, we held a small meeting and decided to go see the Libyans, as some of us spoke Arabic well. We all went together and were very firm, we told them that they mustn’t approach the girls anymore, we surrounded them while we spoke, then the girl’s boyfriend picked up a red-hot piece of wood and wanted to throw it at the Libyan who had wanted to abuse her, but he had pulled out a gun. They all shouted, until the Libyans’ chief called one of us, they spoke, reached an agreement and the situation calmed down. On the next day, we had finished our cigarettes, and the one who had a gun was smoking Marlboros, and when one of us went to ask him for one, he told him: “you call the girl and I’ll give you a Marlboro”.

MURDERS COMMITTED BY THE POLICE DURING ARREST OR IN POLICE STATIONS

Tajo, Nigeria

“I personally know of at least two cases of youths killed by police officers in Tripoli. The first was a Nigerian boy, whose name was Idewin. He was arrested in Tripoli during a round-up and died a few days later due to a bad wound to the head caused by a truncheon blow. The other was a Ghanaian. They had taken him to the police station, I don’t precisely know why. I just know that he died due to a lethal blow with which they struck him on the neck during a beating, it was in February 2007”.

COLLECTIVE REFOULEMENTS AT SEA

Tareke, Erithrea

“We embarked in Zuwarah in July 2005. There were 264 of us, on an old ship, at night. After ten hours at sea, the engine broke down. We spent five days in the sea, in a damaged ship. Then, a military ship bearing a Maltese flag rescued us at around 17:00. There were women and children on board as well. A few hours later, a red boat bearing an Italian flag approached, they took some photographs and then left. The Maltese hooked and towed us and changed direction, southwards. Until a ship bearing a Libyan flag reached us. The Maltese went back, and the Libyans towed us to the nearest harbour, where we arrived the following day. While they made us get off onto the pier, the officers mocked us, ‘So, you wanted to go to Italy, eh?’ and they pushed us, slapping, kicking and punching us”.

Hurui, Erithrea

“It was in July 2005. I had left with my wife Anna and our three-month-old baby. We set off from Zuwarah, there were 64 of us on board. But we had already half-sunk a few hours later, because we were shipping water through the holes between the planks of the hull. The engine broke down. In the morning, a rescue was conducted by the Italian workers from a nearby oil platform. They took the women and children on board, and they never came back. After two days adrift, we were intercepted by an Italian helicopter and were rescued. But in the centre of early reception in Lampedusa, there was no trace of my wife and the baby. Five months later, I met one of the women who had been rescued with my wife in Milan. She told me that they had been handed over to the Libyan coast guard, that they were taken to Zuwarah and arrested. She had managed to leave by paying a guard. Instead, my wife, with the young child, was deported to Kufrah with all the other women”.

Ayman, Tunisia

“There were more than 200 of us. We left on 26 June 2006 from Farwah, an islet off the coast of Bu Kammash, half-way between Rass Jdayr and Zuwarah. After twenty hours at sea, the ship – that was called Tulaitila – was intercepted by a military corvette bearing an Italian flag. They escorted us to land, and we disembarked at eight in the morning on 28 June 2006. During the landing, around 40 people, including the *passseurs*, dived into the sea and managed to escape, all of the rest of us were taken to a centre. On the same day, at around 21:00, they loaded us back on board of the Tulaitila and escorted us until the morning, to then hand us over to a green patrol boat of the Libyan coast guard. We were travelling south, they were taking us back to Zuwarah. At a certain point, a riot broke out between a group of Moroccans and a group of Tunisians, each of which blamed the other for the failure of the crossing. The Libyan officers shot at us. Six people died on the spot. I knew one of them, Hasan Yusef, a Moroccan. We had to throw them overboard into the sea. On 30 June, the Tulaitila finally docked in Zuwarah harbour. After a night in the police station, they transferred us to aj-Jmayl. They questioned us, in groups of five. They asked how we had entered Libya and what we were going to Italy for. I entered with the last three. There were nine policemen in the room. They started beating us, with kicks and truncheon blows. I ended up in hospital with another youth. I had three broken ribs and an internal wound that they did not cure and forced me to undergo surgery once I returned to Sousse, in Tunisia, a month later”.

Ibrahim, Erithrea

“During my first attempted journey, we were stopped in Tunisian waters by the Tunisian police, which put us into a prison for twenty days before leaving us on the other side of the Libyan border, in the hands of Libyan police officers, around Zuwarah. From that moment on, I was transferred to four different prisons (Naser, Fellah, Seraj, Juwazat). Every time that new people arrived and the prison filled up, we were transferred to another one”.

Fatawhit, Erithrea

“We had already left the Libyan coast three days earlier, when we approached some oil platforms. Suddenly, in the middle of the sea, immense platforms rise up that release tongues of fire. From there, a ship that came alongside us appeared. I don't know what country it was from, but I think half the crew was Libyan and the other half Italian. That was the ship that escorted us to the Libyan coast and left us in the hands of the police. We were first put in Juwazat prison for two months, then for one month in Misratak and for eight months in Kufrah”.

Sium, Erithrea

“We had set off from Libya, and lost our way three days into the journey and ran out of petrol travelling aimlessly. We were intercepted by a Libyan military ship that led us back to the coast. I was imprisoned for four months during which I was transferred to five different prisons: Fellah, Ajdabiya; Marj, Binghazi, Kufrah”.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Fatawhit, Erithrea

“I have seen many women raped in Kufrah detention centre. The police officers would enter the room, take a woman and gang rape her in front of everyone. They did not distinguish between single and married women; many of them ended up pregnant and had to undergo an abortion, illegally, endangering their very lives seriously. I saw many women crying because their husbands were beaten, but it was of no use to stop the truncheon blows on their backs”.

Selam, Ethiopia

“In Kufrah, they slept in dormitories with another 50/60 people, women and men, on the floor. They gave us water and bread. I witnessed a woman being raped. It is often four or five police officers who rape a single woman. Many are made pregnant. Once they leave prison, they have no choice but to resort to an illegal abortion. They sometimes use the technique of the needle, in exchange for 200-300 dollars. Many women have died following the abortions”.

Araya, Ethiopia

“I was arrested three times in Libya. During detention in a prison near to Tripoli, I suffered sexual violence by police officers. There was a group of them. Almost all the women detained in Libyan prisons suffer sexual violence perpetrated by the police, maybe the only ones that are spared are the ones that have very young children”.

Wendummo, Erithrea

“In three years in Libya, I’ve been arrested five times: once during the journey, in the desert, twice when I was at home, once when I was on the coast waiting for the boat and once after ten hours at sea, when we were intercepted and taken back to the coast. Every arrest was followed by one or two months in prison. I have been in Kufrah and Misratah prisons. In Misratah, we were 80 women and 60 men in the same big room, sleeping on the floor. I saw my husband being beaten by the police several times, but I couldn’t do anything, because otherwise they would have done the same to me as they were doing to him. In the journey that took me to Lampedusa, I was alone with my 19-day-old daughter, my husband stayed in Libya”.

Hewat, Ethiopia

“We were in a house where they had gathered all the ones who had to embark soon. The Libyan police conducted a raid, they entered the house. They started to beat my husband, I tried to stop them and they beat me as well, they threw me to the ground. I was pregnant, and straight afterwards I lost my baby because of the blows”.

Matiwos, Erithrea

“They arrested me during a round-up in the city and detained me for two months in Marj prison. I witnessed sexual violence on the women”.

Wares, Erithrea

“A woman who was detained in al Fellah, in Tripoli, at the same time as me, told me she was raped by the police”.

ABUSES AND VIOLENCE IN DETENTION CENTRES FOR MIGRANTS

BINGHAZI

Solomon, Ethiopia

“In Libya, I was in prison near Binghazi for five days. Many people, all together, were in a small room. And also outside, under the sun. There was no water to wash. I caught dermatitis all over my body, that I still carry now, in Italy”.

JUWAZAT

Hewat, Ethiopia

“After ten hours at sea, the boat broke down, the Libyan police intercepted us, took us back to the coast and we were all transferred to Juwazat prison”.

Saberen, Eritrea

“We were arrested an hour after our boat had left the Libyan coast. The police intercepted us, took us back to the shore and started beating us there. The violence also continued in the prison to which we were taken: Juwazat. I stayed there for a month and a half. Once, I was trying to defend my brother from the truncheon blows and they beat me as well, slashing my face. One of the practices used in this prison was the one of truncheon blows to the sole of the foot, a point that is particularly sensitive to pain. I had to pay 500 dollars to get out and, moreover, my jewels and the last money I had were stolen before I left”.

SIRT

Abraham, Eritrea

“They arrested me in Binghazi. We had to go to Tripoli, by car. At a roadblock, the police stopped us, asked us for our documents and then took us to the detention centre in Sirt. I was held there for two weeks. They fed us bread and rice. I had 400 dollars on me, with which I bribed an officer who let me out”.

MISRATAH

Tareke, Eritrea

“They dropped us off in Misratah. In the corridor at the centre’s entrance, the police played the ‘kangaroo walk’. Two rows of officers armed with black plastic tubes struck the newcomers, one by one, as they walked towards the dormitories”.

Anonymous 3, Eritrea

“We are approximately 600 detainees in Misratah, all of us Eritreans. There are around a hundred women and fifty children. The first group of 450 people has been inside for a year and six months, the others were taken here four months ago. Some were arrested at sea while they travelled towards Italy. Others were arrested before they left, as they were hidden, awaiting the *passseurs*’ arrival. Others still, were stopped in the street for document checks and there are also people who were taken away from their homes, during night-time raids. One man was still in his pijamas when he was taken to the police station. We left all of our belongings unguarded, at home. Before taking us here, they searched and took everything. Some had political refugee documents, but they ripped them up. During the first weeks of detention, some women were raped by officers. At least seven people have been admitted into hospital with nervous breakdowns. Some people caught scabies or dematitis, some have lung diseases, suffer asthma attacks, intestinal infections and gastritis. Three people were taken to hospital for tuberculosis. Two women have already given birth in hospital, and five others are pregnant, three of whom are close to giving birth. But we don’t have any medical care. They keep us in dormitories where seventy of us sleep on the floor, at night we fit like a jigsaw, with one’s head next to the neighbour’s feet. In the daytime, the heat is unbearable and the air is made heavier by the stench of emissions rising from the toilet pipes that, when they are blocked, release sewage liquids onto the floors. We only have three drums of water to drink per day, for 600 people. At night, instead, it starts getting cold and we don’t have any covers”.

Yohannes, Eritrea

“I spent three months in Libya. They arrested us while we were boarding the ship that was meant to take us to Europe. We were all taken to Misratah, there were a total of 400 people in the prison. There were violent incidents every day, just for their own sake, without any exact reason. There was very little food. I managed to get out by paying the Libyan police”.

Tekle, Eritrea

“During the detention, I was often struck on the back with truncheons”.

ZAWIYAH

Anonymous 4, Eritrea

“There are 500 of us immigrants detained, among whom 103 are Eritreans, three of them minors. We are continuously mistreated by the Libyan prison guards. On 1 September 2007, they made all of us Eritreans strip naked and whipped and struck us with sticks without any reason. Many were kicked in their genital organs. All of this was in front of the women, all of it for no reason. On 22 October 2007, three Eritreans were beaten on the sole of their feet to the point where they couldn't stand up. We have been left without a change of clothes for four months, we currently don't have anything to change into, and we can't wash our clothes because we have no soap. There is an unbearable stench. Around ten people have sores all over their bodies because of the filth, and we are infecting each other. In four months, we have never been visited by a doctor and we haven't seen any sunlight. We don't have any shoes, we are barefoot and, as a result of this we get cold at night, as we don't have any covers. A few days ago, while we were praying, the guards came and beat us badly, calling us Jews. Over 50 of us are crowded together in a room, in poor hygienic conditions”.

KHUMS

Daniel, Eritrea

“I was arrested while I was on the beach awaiting the arrival of the boat in which we were meant to have reached Lampedusa. We had already paid for the journey. The police brought us to Khums prison. There were 50 of us in small rooms, we slept on the floor”.

Anonymous 2, Eritrea:

“We were ready to leave, on the beach, with everything paid for, when the police came. Some managed to escape, but many were arrested. They detained us in Khums. After two months under very hard conditions, we decided to start a hunger strike, as a form of protest. Three days later, to force us to eat, they hit us with truncheons that cause electric shocks. After being struck, we would fall to the floor, I couldn't open my eyes, one's face swells up. The effect of the electric shock lasts for at least two weeks, but you have no right to be seen by a doctor. This technique is generally used if there is a revolt, as was the case of our hunger strike. If a woman rebels when a policeman wants to get violent with her, she is beaten until she has no more strength to resist the rape”.

Sereke, Eritrea

“They arrested me along the coast, while I was boarding. In Khums, they often hit us on the back with truncheons, without any reason. I managed to escape”.

Zekarias, Eritrea

“We had left the Libyan coast on a boat, and after an hour the Libyan authorities arrested us, they arrested and took us to Khums prison. I was detained for a month. They only gave us two pieces of bread to eat and brackish water, every day we were subjected to torture for one or two hours. There were also some unaccompanied minors, who suffered the same violence”.

Weldegabr, Eritrea

“I was arrested while I was embarking. There were 200 people in Khums, including women and children. I paid 600 dollars to be freed”.

MARJ

Fissahe, Eritrea

“I was arrested on the border between Sudan and Libya, they took me to the prison of al Marj. We were 67 Eritreans, with six women among us. They often made us go out into the courtyard and beat us up. I saw some women raped by Libyan police officers. We only ate once a day. After two months, paying 300 dollars to be let out and 250 for transport to Tripoli, they released me. I waited in Tripoli for two months to attempt the crossing. An hour after setting off, the boat capsized

because of the rough sea, and we returned to the coast. There, the police managed to arrest many people while others, including myself, managed to escape”.

Fidane, Eritrea

“I was detained in Marj for two months. We slept on the floor, in dormitories for 40 people. During an escape attempt, they caught us, and they tortured us for three days to punish us, an exemplary punishment to make the others understand what happened to those who sought to flee”.

SABRATAH

Hamdi, Tunisia

“There were ten of us, we had got hold of a boat and left from Qasr Ahmed, in Sabratah, at night, in the summer of 2005. The engine broke down shortly afterwards. On the next morning, the coast guard intercepted us. They took us to Sabratah, in a prison called Dafnie. They kept us closed in rooms measuring six metres by eight. In my cell, we were 45 people. Then, we were around 300 in all. One day, my cellmate, who was Sudanese, tried to escape. They shot to stop him, and then they brought him back with an open gunshot wound in his leg, without taking him to a hospital. The leg went gangrenous and when they decided to take him to hospital, it was too late. The doctors had to amputate [it]. I spent eleven months in prison. Fifteen days after the arrest, they took me to court. As soon as we were outside the prison, I tried to escape but the officers caught me. As punishment, they locked me in an isolation cell. It is a cell that is one metre by one, without any light. They sometimes opened it to give me some food to eat. I did not know if it was day or night anymore, I was full of aches, they didn’t even let me out to get some air”.

TRIPOLI – AL FELLAH

Ayman, Tunisia

“When I was in al Fellah in Tripoli, there were around 1,600 detainees, nine out of ten of whom were migrants, and 260 women. I spent 25 days there. Fellah is right in the centre of Tripoli. There is a central courtyard and, on its sides, a two-floor building with a basement. On every floor, there are six halls divided into eight cells measuring five metres by three. In each cell, which is equipped with a toilet and running water, there are around ten detainees. The alarm call was at five in the morning, with the roll call in the courtyard. At eight, they gave us breakfast. Hot tea and a baguette for every three people. At twelve, lunch. A portion of rice and a baguette for every three of us, without cutlery. The same happened at night. In the daytime, they left us in the courtyard under the sun. At night, instead, after nine they kept us in cells. The women are in a separate dormitory. One night, one of them had labour pains. I heard her scream and cry for them to take her to hospital, but in the end she gave birth there”.

Elvis, Cameroon

“I was detained for six months in al Fellah in Tripoli, before I was deported. And I saw two people killed. It was in June 2006. The Nigerians were the most numerous. They could not stand the prison anymore. They had been inside for eight, nine months. They asked to be repatriated or freed. That morning they refused breakfast. The revolt had affected everyone. They shouted, they banged on the door. They had damaged the walls and were throwing plaster and pieces of cement at the police. The officers’ reaction was very harsh. First they threw teargas into the halls. Then they fired some rifle shots. They hit six men. Then they brought them to hospital. Two were dead, both of them Nigerian. I knew one, he was called Harrison, he came from Benin City. The other four, wounded in the legs and arms, returned after for days, with their stitches still showing”.

Ibrahim, Eritrea

“There were Eritrean, Egyptian, Moroccan and Sudanese detainees. I caught scabies, but they didn’t give me any cure. Like me, many others had scabies. There were also some women in this prison, and life for them is particularly difficult in prison, they undergo a lot of violence. I have seen some women raped by policemen in prison. The police officers threaten migrants with death to keep them calm. The

police officers, especially when they arrest you at home during round-ups, would use a truncheon that causes an electric discharge that immobilises your body with the first blow, and stops you running away. I have also seen the truncheon that causes an electric shock used in prison, when you try to complain about detention conditions, in those cases they use it against men and women alike. The effect on the human body depends on the strength of the electric discharge and on the duration of the blow. If it is strong, it can even cause some effects on the nervous system, you lose your sight for a few days, your face swells up. Using the truncheon with an electric discharge is a practice that they only use occasionally, they generally use a truncheon and kick us. If you don't want to be expelled to your country, you have to pay 500 dollars to the police”.

Tajo, Nigeria

“I have a scar on my right shoulder. It is five centimetres long. It is a reminder of the three months in al Fellaḥ, the truncheon blow by a police officer”.

Hadish, Erithrea

“I lived in Libya for two years. I was imprisoned for a month in al Fellaḥ. There were 250 of us in a room. There was one toilet for all of us. We ate once a day, bread and water”.

Wares, Erithrea

“If someone escapes, all the others are taken out into the courtyard to be questioned about the fate of the fugitive. Those who don't answer, or say they don't know anything, get beaten with a truncheon. They sometimes use a truncheon that gives you an electric shock”.

Anonymous 1, Erithrea

“If you try to escape, they catch and beat you. They leave you for 24 hours, blocked, under the sun, without food nor water. They take off your shoes and strike you on the sole of the feet”.

SABHA

Saleo, Chad

“I was arrested during a round-up by the Libyan police in the immigrants' neighbourhood and detained in a prison a few kilometres away from Sabha. We slept on the floor; they gave us food once a day, a piece of bread and cheese, tea and water. We were 107 Ghanaians, 100 from Niger, four Senegalese, six from Burkina and 22 from Mali. There were women as well, mainly from Ghana and Nigeria. When they arrested me, I was still wearing my work clothes, they didn't give me a change of clothes and it was impossible to shower. They whipped me more than once, without there ever being a precise reason to do so”.

Elvis, Cameroon

“Right now, there are brothers there who are suffering. Some have gone mad. When I was detained in Sabha, for example, I saw some Sudanese who had lost their minds”.

GHAṬ

Kone, Ivory Coast

“Passing from Niger to Algeria was particularly difficult, we crossed the desert in small lorries, there were 30 of us, and a few days later the water finished. We spent eleven days in the Sahara, but 80 km away from Algeria, they made us get out of the lorries and walk, because the traffickers did not want to go directly through Libya. We walked from Djanet, in Algeria, for four days, crossing the desert. Once I was in Libya, I stopped to work in Ghat to be able to gather the money I needed to continue the journey. But they arrested me there and held me in a prison a few kilometres away from Ghat. To get out, I had to pay 300 Libyan dinars. During detention, the police officers often beat me, without a precise reason”.

QATRUN

Fabrice, Togo

“They arrested me in Tripoli. And they took me to al Fellah. Three months later, they transferred me to Qatrun. Luckily, I had managed to hide 50 dollars when I was arrested. So I paid an officer to be freed. We left the prison together, but when I gave him the money, he took me back. Conditions in Qatrun are poor. On one night, they took some men, brought them to the courtyard, made them strip and then beat them with sticks”.

John, Nigeria

“They arrested me in Sabha, while I was on my way to Tripoli, I had come in through Niger. They took me to Qatrun. There were around 500 detainees in the centre. One hundred people for each dormitory, without any beds. There were sick people. But they were terrorised by the thought of being taken to hospital, they feared they would be poisoned”.

Aliu , Ivory Coast

“I was arrested by the Libyan police at the border with Niger and detained for three months in Qatrun. They only gave us bread to eat”.

THE PRACTICE OF FORCED LABOUR

Kamal, Morocco

“We had suffered a shipwreck off the Libyan coast. They rescued and then took us to prison in al Fellah, in Tripoli. Every day, they brought us to do some forced labour. If you told the police officers that you didn’t know how to do a job, they would beat you. And if you complained that you were tired, the same would happen. They didn’t care if the only thing we got to eat was a fistful of rice and a baguette”.

Ayman, Tunisia

“Every day, from al Fellah, a team of around twenty people left to do forced labour in the mountain, in the fields”.

THE TRASFER OF DEPORTEES TO KUFRAH

Tareke, Erithrea

“The lorries arrived in Zuwarah. There were 264 of us, they divided us into two groups and made us get into two lorries, crammed like sardines. We were closed in an iron container, in the dark. There were only two thin slits, sufficient to let some air in and stop us all suffocating. We didn’t manage to move, we were pressing against each other. The journey to Kufrah lasted two days. Two days in the dark, with limited air, of asphyxiating heat, of piss and petrol, of thirst. Without any breaks. The drivers only opened the rear doors again at the gates of the Kufrah detention centre. On board, there were women, one of them pregnant, and some children. They had left us two 25-litre water cans to drink, that finish quickly. We didn’t have anything to eat”.

Anna, Erithrea

“A lorry parked in front of Zuwarah police station. We were around ten women with our respective children, a few years old or new-born babies. They loaded us in alongside another sixty people, inside a lorry. They were taking us to Kufrah, on the border with Sudan. Soon, beneath the July sun, the container became an oven, the air was increasingly heavy, it was pitch dark. The children cried. Two days travelling without anything to drink or eat. Some drank their own urine”.

Menghistu, Ethiopia

“After ten days closed in the *passeurs*’ house in Binghazi, the police came and arrested us, shortly after two others and I had given the middlemen the code to receive the money sent from Addis Ababa by

Western Union. The first police officer who entered the house was clapping his hands for the joy of having found us. He didn't expect to find so many people. They made us climb into a small covered van. You could see the road outside from some small holes, we moved with the sirens at full volume, there were 14 of us. They brought us into a prison and took our fingerprints on a block of yellow paper. I didn't understand Arabic and it was better that way, because the police insults you, threatens you and irritates you to beat you if you display the slightest reaction. But I didn't understand and pretended not to notice. A policeman would come close to me and tell me that it was the second time he had seen me, that I wouldn't ever have left prison again, this is what they translated to me when he went away.

With us, there was a four-year-old boy with his mother, and during my entire journey I wondered: how can you send a mother with a four-year-old child with another hundred people crammed like animals in a lorry like the ones for fruit, where there isn't any air and where we were very tight, without any space to move, during a 21 hour journey, with people urinating and defecating in front of everyone because there was no other option? We travelled from 16:00 to 13:00 of the following day. During the daytime, every time the driver took a break to eat, we stayed closed inside the trailer under the sun, there was a lack of air and everyone got up and panicked, because we couldn't breathe and wanted to get out. It was even harder for those who were at the end. Looking at the boy lifted our courage, and every time the lorry stopped, we picked him up and put him beside the window, his name was Adam. The lorry stopped at least three times in the desert to allow the drivers to eat and to pray. When we were about to enter Kufrah prison, the driver had someone translate to us that if we banged on the lorry's iron body as we entered, he would have stopped for even longer before letting us out. Around 1p.m., we reached Kufrah, the lorry stopped for thirty or forty minutes, and we screamed and begged in Arabic to let us out, in the name of Allah. When I got out, I stole the butter with bread that they had, hanging outside of the lorry. We hadn't eaten for the whole journey, we were 110 people, including Adam the four-year-old and his mother".

Fatawhit, Erithrea

"The transfer from one prison to another one was carried out with a lorry into which 90 people were crammed. The journey lasted for three days and three nights, there weren't any windows and we had nothing to drink. I saw women drinking their husband's urine because they were dying of dehydration".

Ibrahim, Erithrea

"The transfer took place with some lorry-trailers. Measuring six metres by two, without windows, it could carry up to 150 people. On average, the journey lasted ten hours, without a pause for getting some air, even though we felt like we were suffocating".

KUFRAH

Tareke, Erithrea

"In Kufrah, we slept in cells measuring six metres by eight, in mine there were 78 people. The cells remained shut 24 hours out of 24, and in the daytime they became ovens due to how hot it was. At night, we slept crammed together on the floor, with one's head next to his neighbour's feet. We used trousers and T-shirts as a mattress. We were kept close to starving. A plate of rice would be shared between up to seven or eight people. Many people were ill, especially of scabies and dermatitis, but also tuberculosis. Now and then, they would take someone, and bring him into the courtyard to entertain themselves. They would make him do press-ups, and when he couldn't continue any longer, they would fill him with kicks. I left after a month, saying I was Sudanese and a Muslim. Now and then, the police officers would sell 25 or 50 detainees to some local men, who secluded them in their houses, keeping them hostage subject to the payment of a ransom. Women who didn't have the money needed were often forced to pay in kind for their freedom. This happened to my group during the outward journey. We were waiting to set off again for Igdabiya, we were in a house, in Kufrah. A woman didn't have any money left. We had suggested to the *passeur* that we would pay for her. But he didn't want to hear about it and took her to bed with him".

Zerit, Eritrea

“There were around a hundred of us, two cells for the men and one for the women. They kept us shut in all day long. Every cell had its own dilapidated and blocked up toilet. It was cold in the winter. We had some covers, but only one for every five people. After three months in prison, we began a hunger strike in protest. We refused any food for a week, we were very weak but determined. The police did not seem to be at all concerned about our poor state of health. Two other lads and I pretended to be ill, thinking that if they had taken us to hospital we would have been able to attempt an escape. But the officers, who sensed that it was a stunt, showered us with truncheon blows. Then, we changed strategy. On the next day, we accepted to eat. But as soon as the officers opened the doors to bring us our food, we all started running out to gather in the centre’s courtyard. We wanted to meet the person in charge of the centre. But the person in charge did not stand the affront and ordered us back to our cells. In response to our refusal, the officers charged, armed with truncheons, rakes and knives. A boy was stabbed by a policeman during the disturbance”.

Daniel, Eritrea

“In Kufrah, when you hear the noise of keys in the lock of the cell, you have to turn to face the wall. If you look them in the eye, they give you a good beating. You haven’t done anything wrong, but you risk having them break your arm”.

Beyené, Eritrea

“We were at least 700. Around 100 Ethiopians, 200 Eritreans and 400 Sudanese. We slept on the floor, one on top of another, there wasn’t even enough space to lie down. We ate once a day: a fistful of white rice, twenty grammes each. There were baguettes as well, but you had to pay for them. At night, they would take me into the courtyard. Every night. They asked me to do press-ups. When I couldn’t any longer, they kicked me repeatedly and cursed me and my Christian faith. Every night”.

Yakob, Ethiopia

“When I saw Kufrah, I wanted to hang myself. They had taken my mobile phone and all the money I had on me and had thrown me into a cell with another twenty people. There were also cells for women and children. They kept them separately. They raped them in front of their husbands, in front of their brothers. They used irons, sticks... They treated us like beasts. All of this, without a trial. They arrested me in Tripoli, on the very day when I arrived. A week earlier, I had lost the friend with whom I had set off from Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia, in the desert. I only stayed in Kufrah for three months, then I paid and got out. But there are people who are held here for a year. Every month, the lorries came, people were loaded onto them and they were taken to the middle of the desert”.

Fatawhit, Eritrea

“In Kufrah, the living conditions were very hard, there were 250 people in all, 60 per room. We slept on the floor without even a mattress, there was only one bathroom for all 60 of us, but it was inside the room, where a permanent smell of sewage reigned. It was almost impossible to wash, and for this reason a lot of people caught diseases. We ate once a day, almost always rice. In all, there were fifteen police officers, and they often confiscated our money. Once, there was a boy who tried to escape, he wanted to go back to his country, he couldn’t stand the living conditions in prison anymore. They caught him and beat him so badly as to break his bones, then they let him go. The only way to leave Libyan prisons is by paying”.

Menghistu, Ethiopia

“The police officers don’t know how to count, they line you up and as soon as you move they lose count and start again, they curse you and the counting becomes endless. Four of them count, then at the end the chief appears, he asks them how many we are and counts us again. Libyans have no common sense, they treated us like animals.

After counting and separating us as though they were doing something complicated, they put the Eritreans and Ethiopians together, with a bathroom that stank badly, there was no water, and the heat took your breath away. They chose two of ours and two from Chad to cook.

They served us plain rice without anything other than salt and some small pieces of tomato that you found every now and then. They brought the rice over in a pot and, before serving it, they told us to sit in groups of six, and if you didn't, they wouldn't serve you and you wouldn't eat until the following day. During the first few days, we didn't understand what they wanted, so we sat down in groups of three or four people. When you are hungry, you want to eat straight away, so you take the rice with your hands and get burnt, because it's steaming hot. In those days, I was angry with myself for not understanding straight away that the rice burned and that I had to wait. You feel ashamed of being there, suffering these things. A constant humiliation. Then there's the smell that comes from the latrine. They do it on purpose, to make you ashamed of yourself. Then, in Kufrah prison, there is a disease called *asasia*, it is a disease of the prison, a skin disease that makes you scratch until you wound yourself.

We had mattresses to sleep, a T-shirt, shorts and we had no shoes. In prison, there are lice and fleas everywhere, in the mattress, in the clothes, in your hair. Sleeping on the floor is better than doing so on the mattress, it's more hygienic. We remained in prison for several days, until the Sudanese middlemen came to buy us, at least they were better at counting. They bought us for 30 dinars. The same price for which Judas sold Jesus.

With a police pick-up truck, they took us to a field where the Sudanese who were meant to buy us came, and they took us to a place where there were lots of people. The Sudanese middleman sold us on to a Libyan man who bought the ones who were able to receive money from their families and took us to an oasis in the desert, where there were trees and water. There were no houses, but rather, huts made out of palm tree branches. Here, there were two Ethiopian girls who were prisoners, that the Libyans did not allow to leave and kept as prostitutes. They were sisters, and you could figure out that the elder one was prostituting in an attempt to protect the younger sister. From there, we set off again for Ajdabiya”.

THE DEPORTATIONS TO THE DESERT

Fabrice, Togo

“From Qatrun, they loaded us into a lorry and abandoned us on the border with Niger, at the height of Toumou. We had to walk for three days, under the sun, to reach Madama, in Niger”.

Zerit, Eritrea

“They loaded us into some lorries and we left, heading for the border. At the border point, the driver stamped some papers and then, a few kilometres later, he stopped and asked us to pay 200 dollars each to take us back. We managed to negotiate and we lowered the requirement to 100 dollars each. There were 100 of us. After pocketing his 10,000 dollars, he took us back to Kufrah and abandoned us around thirty kilometres away from the city, on our own, without anyone returning the 8,000 dollars that they had confiscated from my 50 travel companions and I when we were arrested, three months earlier. That night, while we tried to reach the outskirts of Kufrah on foot, we were assaulted by a gang of bandits. They were armed, and first they made us strip, and then they stole everything from us

Elvis, Cameroon

“They deported us all, from Qatrun to Toumou, on the border with Niger. Toumou is an oasis where Libyan border soldiers live. They had abandoned us there, under the sun, two days' walk away from Qatrun, and just as many from Madama, across the border in Niger. We used the glare of the lights of the oasis at night to find our way. In September 2007, there were 150 migrants living in Toumou who are completely blocked, without any money to continue the journey, some of whom have gone mad. The smugglers who were returning from Libya gave us a lift towards Dirkou. But then they unloaded us two days' walk away from Dirkou. And once we finally arrived in Dirkou, the Niger policemen refused to receive us. They recovered the corpses of two travel companions of ours who had died under the sun, and then loaded us onto an off-road vehicle to take us back to Toumou. The Libyan police took us

back to Qatrun. Two weeks later, a Nigerian friend who I met in prison again bribed a guard and they freed us once more”.

Yakob, Ethiopia

“They leave for the desert and, half-way there, they ask you for money to go back. I met a youth in Zuwarah who had spent six months in Kufrah and was then deported. They were fifty in the lorry. Half-way there, the driver asked them to pay three hundred dollars each. Only thirty of them had the money. They went back with them. The other twenty were ditched in the desert. They will have died under the sun, surely. They even take money that you don’t have from you. If, for example, you don’t have any money on you, but you have a relative in Europe who is able to pay, before abandoning you on the border, they lend you their satellite mobile phone to call and ask them for a *Western Union* money order”.

Anna, Eritrea

“After three months of detention in Kufrah, at the break of dawn, without any warning, they loaded around sixty persons onto a lorry. At a certain point, the driver made us all get off, in the middle of the desert. For two hundred dollars each, he would have taken us back to the city. Those who had more money paid for those, like me, who did not have any. Once we reached the outskirts of Kufrah, the police officers themselves put us in touch with some *passeurs* who were friends of theirs”.

Menghistu, Ethiopia

“In Bengasi, there were Daniel and I, and another two boys from Kircos (a neighbourhood in Addis Ababa), and another boy who had already made the trip the previous year, but who the police had first arrested, then imprisoned and deported to the desert, abandoning him there with others on the border with Sudan. They had been found there in the desert by other cars that were travelling, and were taken back to Kufrah”.

The international Conventions cited in the report can be consulted online

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/h_cat39.htm
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
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- UN Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/protect/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=3b66c2aa10>
- Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa
http://www.africa-union.org/Official_documents/Treaties_%20Conventions_%20Protocols/Refugee_Convention.pdf
- European Convention on Human Rights and its Five Protocols
<http://www.hri.org/docs/ECHR50.html>

All the data cited is official and can be found in the following reports:

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http://www.meltingpot.org/IMG/doc/libia_commissione.doc
- Report, “Stemming the flow: abuses against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees”, Human Rights Watch, September 2006
http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/libya0906/libya0906w_ebwcover.pdf
- Frontex technical mission in Libya, 28 May 2007 – 5 June 2007
(document that is not public)
- Monthly Fortress Europe reports, Fortress Europe, years 2006-2007
<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com>
- L’ultimo viaggio dei dannati nel Sahara, Fabrizio Gatti, L’Espresso, 24 March 2005
<http://www.migreurop.org/article787.html>
- Ministero dell’Interno, statistics on immigrants who landed illegally in Italy, 2006
http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/notizie/immigrazione/notizia_23488.html

APPENDIX

MAP OF THE DETENTION CENTRES IN LIBYA



According to the testimonies collected in this report, there are at least 20 detention centres for migrants in Libya: in Ajdabiya, Binghazi, Ghat, Gharyan, Ghudamis, aj-Jmayl, Juwazat (not indicated on the map), Khums, Kufrah, Marj, Misratah, Qatrun, Sabratah, Sabha, Sirt, Surman, Tripoli, (at least two centres: Janzur and Fellah), Zawiyah, Zuwarah.

To surf around the map:

<http://maps.google.it/maps/ms?hl=it&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF-8&msa=0&ll=31.184609,14.018555&spn=8.566674,14.80957&z=6&om=1&msid=103864672291339960983.00043cb18e78fd4555dbc>

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This work is dedicated to the memory of all the migrants who have perished travelling towards Europe

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