



MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



Libya: EU support drives human suffering in detention centers; 17,500 deaths in the Mediterranean since 2013

On September 2, 2015, the lifeless body of 3 year old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi washed up on a beach in Turkey; the photo of his body became a symbol for the tremendous loss of innocent lives of those desperate enough to risk crossing the Mediterranean Sea from the Middle East or North Africa to reach Europe.



Mural depicting the famous photo of 3 year old Alan Kurdi in Frankfurt/M., Germany. Source: Frank C. Müller, CC BY-SA 4.0

The IOM reported that from October 2013 through November 2017, over 15,000 men, women, and children have drowned in the Mediterranean in their attempt to reach Europe. These deaths total over 50% of ALL migrant or refugee deaths worldwide over the same four year period. UNHCR adds an estimate of 2,275 deaths over the course of 2018, with other estimates being even higher. To add to this horror, instead of becoming safer, this journey is only becoming more deadly; on the route from Libya to Europe, the rate of deaths rose from 1 in 38 in 2017 to 1 in 14 arrivals in 2018 (UNHCR), though the overall number of sea deaths has dropped. However, another 200 have already died in first 21 days of 2019; in total, this means around 2,500 people have drowned on this journey in the past 13 months alone, and the deadliness of the journey itself has nearly tripled. In total, approximately 17,500 have lost their lives since 2013.



Though the EU and its politicians are fully aware of the scale of this threat to the right to life, the most fundamental of human rights, instead of increasing aid to rescue activities, it has concentrated funding and policy on trapping migrants in Libya to prevent them from crossing in the first place. This includes setting up the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), to 'fight the root causes of irregular migration', with a budget of 4.3 billion as of last year. According to its own report from 2018, nearly a third of this funding is in fact directed towards 'Improved migration management', not root causes. 90 million Euros is earmarked for Libya alone, the intended result of which is essentially to close this last major migration route to Europe.

Meanwhile, this has doomed hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees from African countries to suffer in miserably overcrowded, unsafe, and unsanitary conditions in Libyan detention camps, which have included extensive reports of extortion, torture, rape, and even slavery. Deaths from inadequate medical care and lawlessness in the camps have also been reported. Libya is considered a failed state without effective rule of law and therefore does not have a legal framework or practical means to safely manage refugee intake or asylum cases; detention is therefore arbitrary and indefinite. Instead of working to create a humane alternative solution, the EU has been pouring funding into Libyan law enforcement agencies, including the coast guard, to continue this unfathomably horrible situation that violates the human rights of those held in Libya. This is absolutely unacceptable and incompatible with the fundamental values of the EU; alternatives should not be encouraged but instead demanded.

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