

December 2024 February 2026

women

STATE Trafficking

Gender-based violence, expulsions, and sale of black migrant women
from Tunisia to Libya

33 TESTIMONIES FROM AN EXTERNAL EU BORDER

RR[X]

supported by

ASGI

Border
Forensics

THE ROUTES JOURNAL

ON/BORDERS

MELTING POT EUROPA

A report by:

RR[X]

Researchers X is an international research group that has decided to remain anonymous and go by a collective pseudonym. This choice is dictated by the need to protect their safety while allowing them to continue their work on a topic that cannot be researched freely in Tunisia without being subjected to radical repression. The group planned the research, collected and analysed the materials, as well as supervising the entire research process.

With the legal, mapping, scientific and dissemination support by:

ASGI

Asgi is an association focused on promoting social justice, which was founded in 1990 by a group of lawyers, jurists, and scholars working on immigration, asylum, and citizenship. They develop advocacy actions to change discriminatory laws which are in conflict with the Italian Constitution and the International Conventions Italy has signed. In addition, they denounce and oppose rights violations through strategic litigation. [www.asgi.it]

Border Forensics

Border Forensics is an agency which uses innovative methods involving spatial and visual analysis to research practices of border violence, wherever it might take place. By working collaboratively with migrant communities and non-governmental groups, they aim to promote and defend the dignity and rights of migrants and foster mobility justice. [www.borderforensics.org]



Is a grassroots information project involving artists, activists, researchers, refugees, and people who have crossed the Mediterranean. It has an Instagram profile featuring contributions by a network of correspondents located along various migration routes. [[instagram:theroutesjournal](https://www.instagram.com/theroutesjournal)]

ON/BORDERS

On Borders is a plural and multidisciplinary space to observe, research, and analyse borders, margins, and transcendences. This project is the result of twenty years of collaboration between historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and visual arts specialists, between academia and civil society, involving research and civic engagement. On Borders aims to refine observation, research and social analysis methodologies and techniques, sharing materials and comparative analyses. [onborders.altervista.org]



Is a publishing initiative founded in 1996. It serves as an active space for information, education, and cooperation on citizens' rights and freedom of movement. It is aimed at people with a migrant background, professionals, and civil society organizations. [www.meltingpot.org]

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The document *Women State Trafficking*, was finalised in March 2026.

We have chosen not to use inclusive language in order to ensure maximum readability and accessibility of the text. This decision is purely technical and intended to ensure greater clarity. As for the female witnesses, we have retained the forms of expression they preferred.

Warning

In recent years the Tunisian regime has repeatedly used the following regulations to criminalise all forms of protest.

Decree-Law No. 54 of 13 September 2022

Combats offences related to information and communication systems.

Art.24 punishes anyone who intentionally uses communication systems to spread "false news," misleading data or "rumours" with the aim of harming the rights of others, compromising public or national security or "spreading terror among the population" with five years' imprisonment.

State Security (Book II, Title I, Chapters 1 and 2), articles on:

- *Conspiracy against internal and external state security.*
- *Exchange of information with agents whose purpose is to damage Tunisia's diplomatic situation.*
- *Offences against the President of the Republic.*

Article 72 of the Penal Code

- *Offences relating to the will to change the form of government.*

Article 128 of the Penal Code

- *Public denunciation of illegal acts attributed to a public official without evidence.*

The statements in the report as well as the documentation of places, routes, and actors responsible for violent conduct and human rights violations, are entirely based on the testimonies provided by the victims. The texts introducing the testimonies are descriptive summaries of what emerges from the interviews. This report is intended as an archive available for any subsequent investigations, trials, and restorative justice.

Acronyms

ASI	Internal Security Agency
DCIM	Department for Combating Illegal Migration
EU	European Union
GNT	Tunisian National Guard
GNU	Government of National Unity
LAAF	Libyan Arab Armed Forces
LBG	Libyan Border Guard
LNA	Libyan National Army
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya

*"Slavery is a sin when whites were put to the yoke,
but not the African.
All men are created equal,
unless we decide you are not a man."*

Colson Whitehead, The Underground Railroad

Summary

Since 2023, significant EU funding has allowed Tunisia to establish a system to intercept people at sea, arrest them, and perform mass expulsions to Libya, affecting thousands of migrants and refugees of sub-Saharan origin, including women, families, minors, and children.

Following on from the first State Trafficking report published in January 2025, the **Women State Trafficking report is based on 33 new interviews with victims of expulsion and trafficking operations which were carried out between December 2024 and the time of writing. It also draws on the geolocation work carried out by Border Forensics to highlight the persistence of systematic human trafficking at the border between Tunisia and Libya** at the hands of the Tunisian National Guard and military forces, and the interconnection between the expulsion infrastructure and the abduction industry in Libyan prisons. In particular, this report identifies the **Tunisian National Guard (GNT) barracks in El Meguissem** and a multifaceted network of detention facilities in Libya – including Al Assah, Bir Al Ghanam, and Characharah (Tripoli) – as the main hubs of state-sponsored trafficking through which those who collaborated in writing the RRX reports have passed.

Between June 2023 and December 2025, **approximately 7,400 people were subjected to state-sponsored human trafficking.** However, this is a conservative estimate based solely on the 59 mass expulsions from Tunisia to Libya that we were able to detect through the testimonies we collected.

Unlike in the first report, interviews with victims (primarily women who were released from Libyan prisons) shed light on two intertwined dimension of trafficking: **structural gender-based violence** inflicted through absence of medical care, dehumanizing treatment, intimate searches and rape perpetrated by state agents (on both sides of the Tunisian-Libyan border), **and the link between Libyan prisons, forced prostitution, and labor slavery.** Specifically, for women whose families lack the financial resources to pay the ransom, forced prostitution is the only way to settle their debt and ‘earn’ their release. However, the brothels ‘insolvent’ women are sent to in Libya are yet another setting characterized by detention, violence, and exploitation.

Like the first report, this one contributes to **documenting events and situations which, in the social sciences and international law, are classified under the term ‘state crimes’.** Thus, the Women State Trafficking report aims to reopen the debate on **the responsibility** of the **European Union** and single member states for exposing people on the move to death and slavery, as well as on the status of ‘safe third country’ and ‘place of safety’ assigned to Tunisia, and its role, alongside Libya, as a partner and economic beneficiary in the management of the EU’s external border.

Based on the testimonies that have been collected and verified, and thanks to ASGI, the two report have also enabled several witnesses and victims of state-sponsored trafficking to lodge **appeals against Tunisia with the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights.**

The international research group that drafted the report after collecting and analyzing the testimonies has decided to **remain anonymous to ensure the safety** of all those who contributed and to allow them to keep operating on the ground and documenting what is still happening.

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Introduction.

Following up on the State Trafficking report

The Women State Trafficking report follows up on the first report on state-sponsored trafficking⁽¹⁾, which was published in January 2025, and focuses on the gender-based violence suffered by migrant and refugee women in Tunisia and Libya during expulsion, sale, and detention operations between December 2024 and February 2026.

The first report was based on thirty first-hand accounts by victims, which highlighted the involvement of the Tunisian authorities in human trafficking activities along the Tunisian-Libyan border, as well as their responsibility for serious human rights violations. In particular, the victims' accounts allowed us to reconstruct the five stages of a logistic chain that is integrated, well-funded, and refined partly as a result of agreements between the EU and Tunisia. **The chain is structured as follows:**

1) capture in various locations across Tunisia; 2) abduction to the Tunisian-Libyan border; 3) detention in camps near the Tunisian border; 4) transfer and sale to Libyan state and non-state armed groups; 5) detention in Libyan prisons until the ransom is paid.

Since its publication, the State Trafficking report has been presented on several occasions in institutional settings: the European Parliament (29 January and 4 February 2025), the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (2 April 2025), the Senate of the Italian Republic (14 May 2025), during the 58th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva (3 March 2025) and during the 56th session of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in Palermo (25 October 2025) dedicated to human rights violations against migrants by Maghrebi states. **On all these occasions, numerous witnesses who had experienced and survived state-sponsored trafficking contributed and made their voices heard, both in person and remotely.**

Furthermore, throughout 2025, RR[X] researchers have participated in dozens of informal and confidential meetings with officials from some of the main international agencies and various European Union bodies. On these occasions, they presented the report, shared further evidence, provided the geographical coordinates of the state-sponsored trafficking sites in Tunisia, requested the relocation of witnesses to a safe country, and urged these organizations to launch investigations given that **a significant part of the infrastructure used for state-sponsored trafficking indirectly benefits from funds made available by the European Union and Italy** to intercept departures, as documented by ASGI in its contribution to the State Trafficking report.

Following these institutional presentations, two parliamentary questions were submitted to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs⁽²⁾ and one to the European Commission; only the latter received a response. In its document dated 25 April 2025, the Commission rejected our request to open a humanitarian-legal corridor for the witnesses of the first State Trafficking report, "as Tunisia and Libya do not qualify as countries at war".

⁽¹⁾ Entitled "State Trafficking: Expulsion and Sale of Migrants from Tunisia to Libya", the first report is available at <https://statetrafficking.net> (all links provided in this report were last accessed on 3 March 2026)

⁽²⁾ <https://www.senato.it/show-doc?tipodoc=Sindisp&leg=19&id=1447514>
https://statetrafficking.net/interrogazione-5_04577.pdf

The Commission also stated that it was closely monitoring the human rights situation in the country through regular missions⁽³⁾.

Furthermore, in October 2025, with the support of ASGI, **witnesses 35 and 36 of the Women State Trafficking report commenced a legal action against Tunisia** before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, alleging that they had been subjected to trafficking at the Libyan border.

In a brief statement issued on 7 February 2025, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia responded to the findings of the State Trafficking report, which had been widely covered in the European and international press⁽⁴⁾, denouncing the dissemination of "slandorous accusations and the circulation of false and misleading news that do not reflect reality⁽⁵⁾".

In March 2025, the Permanent Mission of Tunisia in Geneva responded to communication ALTUN 06/24 of October 2024 from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Office of Special Procedures), which mentioned the involvement of Tunisian law enforcement agencies in the trafficking of migrants. Their written response stated that no ministerial office had ever received any complaint on the matter and that, consequently, no investigation was being launched⁽⁶⁾.

In the same year (2025), a report on human trafficking by the US Department of State mentioned the involvement of Tunisian State actors: "There were increased allegations of official complicity in trafficking crimes, including reports of officials "selling" migrants to Libyan officials and armed groups known to exploit them in labor and sex trafficking; the government did not take adequate law enforcement action against allegedly complicit officials⁽⁷⁾".

More than 14 months after the publication of the first State Trafficking report, some witnesses have disappeared, many have been detained and expelled again to Libya, while others have reached Europe travelling on makeshift boats along the Mediterranean route. To date, most of them still reside in Libya and Tunisia.

Meanwhile, RR[X] have lost contact with three of the witnesses who contributed to the first State Trafficking report; as for the others, RR[X] continue to call for their relocation to a country that will guarantee their protection and their right to seek justice, truth, and reparation.

^[3] The parliamentary question and the Commission's response are published here:

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-000583_EN.html

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-000583-ASW_EN.html

^[4] <https://statetrafficking.net/press>

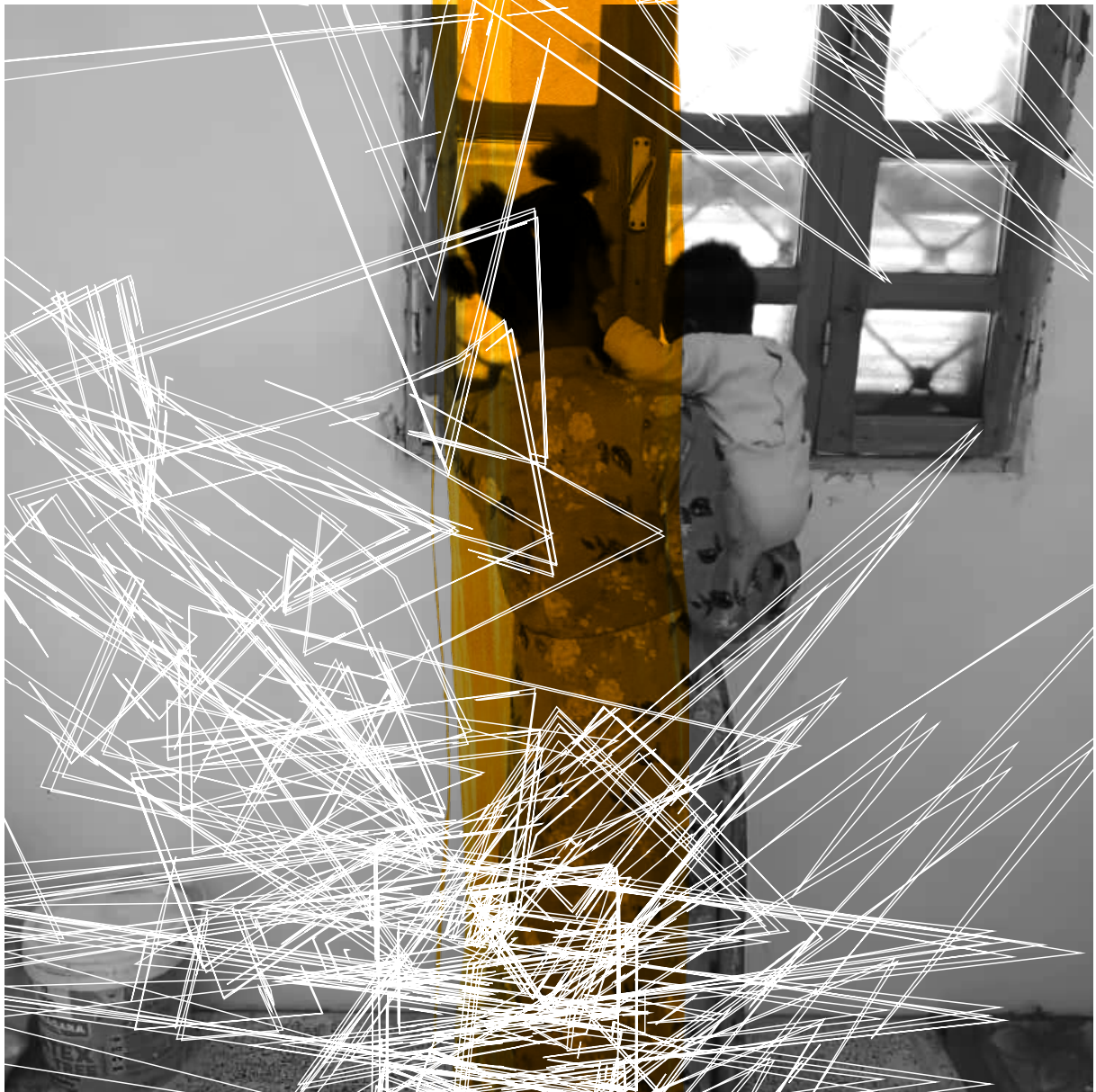
^[5] Facebook post by the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 February 2025:

<https://www.facebook.com/TunisieDiplo/posts>

[pfbid034pqgEWTrMrZdNaTyaRYcC4TK9sxq21uhWuBinr2nN8aLz99NLHsHYKFhZbUMBZTel](https://www.facebook.com/TunisieDiplo/posts/pfbid034pqgEWTrMrZdNaTyaRYcC4TK9sxq21uhWuBinr2nN8aLz99NLHsHYKFhZbUMBZTel)

^[6] <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=38930>

^[7] <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/tunisia>



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Context and research questions

Throughout 2025, in addition to the publication of the State Trafficking report, there were further journalistic investigations, research reports, legal initiatives, and documents published by international institutions which kept the spotlight on these practices. This has highlighted the authoritarian turn in the Tunisian regime, which has been using repression against activists, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, political opponents, and NGOs working in the field of migration, as well as systematically violating the rights of migrants and refugees in Libya and Tunisia.

In Tunisia, people who are racialized as ‘black’ and ‘sub-Saharan’ migrants continue to be the targets of hate campaigns and state-sanctioned racism, which is linked to the government’s shift towards authoritarianism⁽⁸⁾. They are subjected to abuse and violence, including arbitrary detention, collective expulsions to Libya and Algeria, absence of legal safeguards during arbitrary arrests, lack of medical care and assistance after sea-interceptions, suspension of access to the asylum registration process, and sexual violence during arrest, expulsion and detention operations⁽⁹⁾.

Against this backdrop, the Garde Nationale Tunisienne (GNT) has continued its interception operations at sea, particularly off the coast of Sfax, fueling the volume of expulsions toward the Libyan and Algerian borders. Amnesty International’s recent report has reiterated that “Tunisia is not a safe country” for the lives of migrants and refugees. Yet, in February 2026, the European Parliament included Tunisia in a list of third countries which are considered safe countries of origin and transit⁽¹⁰⁾.

In addition to the many documented human rights violations against migrants and refugees, the involvement of the Tunisian authorities in human trafficking at the border with Libya highlights a series of contraventions of international law which have already been listed in detail by ASGI in the first State Trafficking report. It should also be noted that Tunisia has signed the Palermo Protocol (2000), the main international treaty to combat human trafficking.

In Libya, systematic human rights violations, arbitrary detention, torture, and the enslavement of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees have been continuing for years with total impunity and have been perpetrated by armed groups as well as state actors involved in border management.

⁽⁸⁾ In February 2023, President Kaïs Saïed delivered a hate speech targeting the sub-Saharan population in Tunisia, invoking the threat of ethnic replacement and triggering a wave of attacks by civilians, police raids, and hostile measures against all “black” people, be they legally residing in Tunisia or undocumented migrants.

⁽⁹⁾ *Amnesty International’s 2025 report*: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/0180/2025/it/>
the 2026 report by the OHCHR: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/business-usual-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-against-migrants-asylum-seekers>
the 2025 report by the OMCT: <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/reports/torture-roads-vol-n-4-children-on-the-move>
the report by the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal : <https://permanentpeopletribunal.org/56-violazioni-dei-diritti-dei-migranti-da-parte-degli-stati-del-maghreb-dellunione-europea-e-di-alcuni-dei-suoi-stati-membri-palermo-23-25-ottobre-2025/>
and the report published by HRW in April 2025: https://inkyfada.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/tunisia0425-web_0.pdf

⁽¹⁰⁾ [https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2025/0101\(COD\)](https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2025/0101(COD))

These violations occur in the following facilities: official detention centers, which are under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli and are managed by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM); unofficial centers which, despite operating under the aegis of state security agencies, are not formally affiliated with the DCIM; and illegal centers run by informal armed groups that support the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) or the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) loyal to General Khalifa Haftar. In March 2025, the Libyan Internal Security Agency (ASI), announced **the suspension of the activities of 10 NGOs accused of “hostile activities” aimed at undermining the sovereignty of the Libyan state, altering the demographic balance, and encouraging the settlement of irregular migrants in the country**⁽¹¹⁾.

The cycle of abuse and human rights violations, which is enabled by the lack of protection for migrants and refugees, results in forced labor, sexual exploitation, ransom and extortion, as well as the sale and trafficking of people from Tunisia to Libya. **Between June 2023 and April 2025, according to a joint report by the UNSMIL and the OHCHR, “forces of the Libyan Ministry of the Interior and the Libyan Border Guard intercepted 12,750 migrants and refugees at the border with Tunisia”⁽¹²⁾. Among them were also the witnesses whose testimonies featured in the first report and in this one.**

In light of this, the **Women State Trafficking** report aims to provide answers to two research questions:

- **Are the migrant trafficking operations carried out by Tunisian state agencies in collusion with Libyan state agencies and armed groups which were documented in the first State Trafficking report between June 2023 and November 2024 still ongoing?**
- **What are the specific forms of violence and gender-based violence used against women, families, and minors (accompanied and unaccompanied) during the expulsion and sale operations carried out at the border between Tunisia and Libya?
Is there a link between the expulsion of migrant women from Tunisia and the system of detention and sexual exploitation in Libya?**

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://www.a-dif.org/2025/04/02/in-libia-blocco-per-unhcr-ed-ong-e-caccia-ai-migranti-ed-ai-testimoni/>

⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/business-usual-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-against-migrants-asylum-seekers>



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Research methodology and geolocation of interviews

RR[X] was responsible for collecting and analyzing the testimonies featured in this report, while The Routes Journal and OnBorders contributed to identifying the interviewees, and Border Forensics carried out the geolocation of the testimonies. In addition, ASGI provided legal advice and support to witnesses, and lodged the appeals against the Tunisian government with the African Court on Human and People's Rights. Finally, Melting Pot Europa has been managing the research project's press office.

The 30 testimonies collected for the first report were related to trafficking operations that took place between June 2023 and November 2024. **From December 2024 onwards, RR[X] kept collecting and analyzing new testimonies, with the aim of continuing to monitor state-sponsored trafficking and examining the specific experiences of women and minors in greater depth.** From December 2024 to the time of writing, 33 new interviews have been conducted.

Of these 33 interviews, 19 were with women, including 3 minors, while 14 interviews were with men, including 3 minors. Men have been included in this report as members of a family that was expelled or as direct witnesses of violence against women. Thirteen of the women are mothers of young children or infants, while five were pregnant at the time of their arrest and expulsion.

The interviewees were recruited through various channels including: a) private communication groups used by people on the move in the Maghreb; b) community leaders in the camps in Libya and Tunisia; c) witnesses from the first RR[X] report who had arrived in Europe; d) the network of correspondents of The Routes Journal.

At the time of writing (March 2026), **30 out of the 33 people interviewed are in Libya** where, despite not being in prison when they were interviewed, they are still at risk of being kidnapped and exploited; one person is still being held in domestic slavery.

All testimonies have been recorded, anonymized, and collected in an archive on which this report draws to provide several excerpts. At the time of writing, the researchers were still in contact with all the witnesses.

The interviews, which lasted an average of 90 minutes, were conducted in French and English, and followed the same structure used for the interviews featured in the first report. They explore gender-based violence during state-sponsored trafficking in more depth and cover the following stages: a) capture; b) transportation to the border; c) detention at the border; d) buying and selling; e) detention in Libya, ransom and release, or enslavement for labor and sexual exploitation.

Each interview documents a specific operation of expulsion and collective sale involving between 50 and 200 people (men, women and children, accompanied and unaccompanied).

The interviews with people in Libya were conducted remotely through multiple conversation sessions. During the first session, the interviewers introduced the research project and participants were briefed about the study's objectives, the methods of data use, and the guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was also obtained at this stage. Subsequent sessions were dedicated to collecting and recording testimonies.

These conversations have enabled us to identify the violence suffered by women and children at various stages of the trafficking chain, from expulsions and forced transfers carried out by the Tunisian authorities to the conditions of detention, abduction, and exploitation subsequently endured in Libya. The interviews have allowed us to document not only episodes of state violence, but also the organizational methods and stages through which this coercive supply chain is built.

Often witnesses shared images, audio, and video materials with RR[X], providing useful elements to define the timeframe and geography of a continuum of violence. This has enabled us to map forced movements and, in many cases, identify the locations where state-sponsored trafficking between Tunisia and Libya takes place.

In practical terms, through spatial analysis and the examination of satellite images, we were able to identify some of the locations described in the victims' first-hand accounts. The geolocation of State-sponsored trafficking routes⁽¹³⁾, complements the investigation which had already been carried out in the first report and is based on all 63 interviews collected in RR[X]'s archive between June 2023 and the time of writing.

More specifically, the work carried out to reconstruct and geolocate the testimonies has made it possible to map the area where trafficking operations take place with relative precision, confirming the consistency between geographical locations, the distances between identified locations, and the landscape details described during the interviews. They also provide evidence of the geographical extent of a system of capture and exploitation from Tunisia – where arbitrary arrests and expulsions take place, particularly in the Sfax region – to the border areas where human trafficking occurs and on to the places where people are subsequently detained and sexually exploited in Libya.

Urban settings are generally characterized by a greater number of recognizable landmarks, which makes them easier to identify. For this reason, all the places where people were initially arrested and gathered in Tunisia, as well as the many detention and exploitation sites in Libya, which were located near urban areas, tend to be more easily identifiable. Indeed, in these contexts, people were better able to orient themselves spatially and, during interviews, further details emerged regarding the position of detention facilities. Conversely, the passive and violent conditions endured during forced transfers combined with the desert landscape of border areas made it much harder to provide precise spatial coordinates. Therefore, people struggled to clearly reconstruct the routes they traveled and the the places where they crossed the border.

One exception was the GN barracks in El Meguissem (32°58'48"N - 11°27'20"E), where most of the witnesses interviewed for the two reports spent time. This is the place where cages are positioned under antennas, which functions as the main hub of the state-run trafficking network that sells prisoners to the Al Assah detention complex in Libya.

^[13] <https://statetrafficking.net/geo>

The amount of time prisoners spent in El Meguissem varied depending on the sales agreements made with the various Libyan actors involved in human trafficking.

From the barracks, a dirt track leads south-east toward a crossing point through a sandy trench (32°59'02"N – 11°30'26" E). Witness SK (Int. 37) provided a detailed account of the route, linking the last detention center where they were held in Tunisia with the point of sale at the border⁽¹⁴⁾.

In the first State Trafficking report, anonymity was a necessary condition to protect all the people involved in the project. **Given that the violent repression which characterizes this context has not changed since then, RR[X] has decided to maintain anonymity in the second report** to ensure the safety and physical well-being of all the people who contributed. Public denunciation of systematic abuse against people on the move can, in fact, lead to direct reprisal against witnesses, researchers, and local correspondents.

In this sense, the decision to maintain anonymity responds to the growing criminalization by the Tunisian and Libyan authorities of any form of dissent to and independent documentation of expulsions and violations of the rights of migrants and asylum seekers.

Given that the subject matter of this report is gender-based violence, the interviews were conducted by a female researcher with extensive experience in anti-trafficking interventions. In most cases, their relationships with the witnesses did not end with the interviews, but continued through **acts of care, listening, and emotional support.** All the interviewees bore physical and psychological scars as a result of the violence they had suffered during their expulsion from Tunisia and detention in Libya. In many cases, the witnesses' accounts do not follow a chronological order, but the thread running through their stories is the emotions stirred by recalling the violence they had suffered.

The report goes on to examine three stages of state-sanctioned trafficking of women: 1) **'Dehumanization'**, namely the degrading practices, and rituals of humiliation and neglect which contribute to the physical and psychological subjugation of migrants and racialized people; 2) **'Rapes'**, that is the systematic use of physical and sexual violence against women, families, and children; 3) **'Forced prostitution'**, specifically the industry of sexual and labor exploitation following the sale of women within the detention system in Libya.

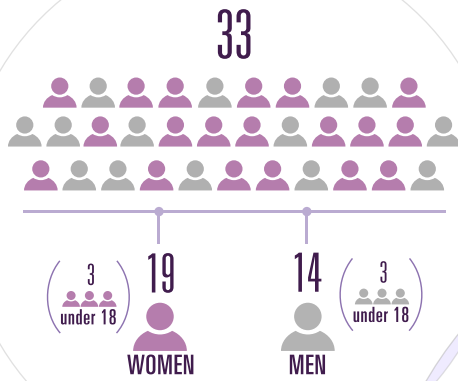
^[14] <https://statetrafficking.net/video>



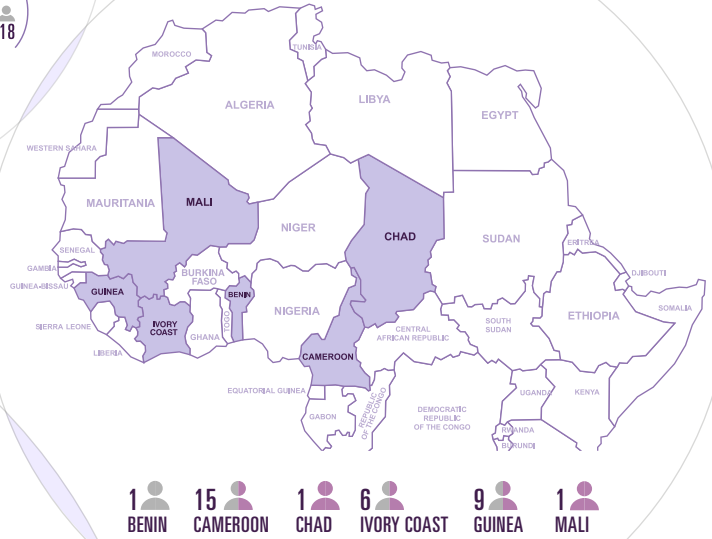
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Who are the witnesses?

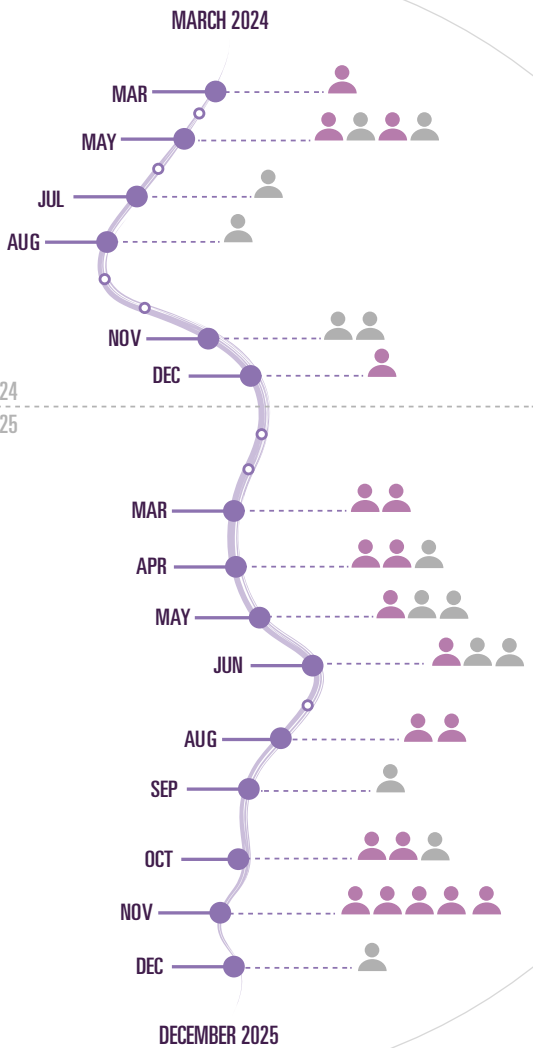
INTERVIEWEES



COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



MONTH OF EXPULSIONS



PLACE at time of interview



Who are the witnesses?

INT.	NAME	SEX	AGE	COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN	Month of EXPULSION	UNHCR STATUS	Place of ARREST	Route of EXPULSION	PRISONS of LIBIA	Place of INT.
31	FTM	F	21-30	Mali	03/2024	NO	Sfax (sea)	-	Al Assah	LIB
32	PRT	M	31-40	Cameroon	05/2024	NO	El Jem (city)	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	TUN
33	NS	F	21-30	Ivory Coast	05/2024	NO	Ariana	Tataouine	Characharah	LIB
34	NSJ	M	31-40	Ivory Coast	05/2024	NO	Ariana	Tataouine	Bir Al Ghanam	LIB
35	RS	F	31-40	Cameroon	05/2024	NO	Sfax (sea)	Ben Gardane	Oussama	IT
36	SLM	M	31-40	Guinea	07/2024	NO	Sfax (sea)	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	LIB
37	SK	M	31-40	Guinea	08/2024	SI	Sfax (city)	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	TUN
38	MMD	M	U18	Guinea	11/2024	NO	Sfax (sea)	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	LIB
39	BSS	M	31-40	Benin	11/2024	NO	Kerkennah (sea)	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	LIB
40	MRT	F	21-30	Chad	12/2024	NO	Sfax (sea)	-	Al Assah	LIB
41	TTN	F	U18	Cameroon	03/2025	NO	Sea	Expulsion by sea to Libya	Al Assah	LIB
42	MRL	F	31-40	Cameroon	03/2025	NO	Sea	Expulsion by sea to Libya	Al Assah	LIB
43	SLMN	M	U18	Guinea	04/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	Tataouine	-	LIB
44	YSS	M	21-30	Cameroon	05/2025	NO	Sfax (olive groves)	Tataouine	Bir Al Ghanam	LIB
45	SND	F	21-30	Cameroon	05/2025	NO	Sfax (olive groves)	Tataouine	Characharah	LIB
46	BK	M	21-30	Guinea	05/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	Ben Gardane	Bir Al Ghanam	LIB
47	HGS	M	41-50	Cameroon	06/2025	SI	Sfax (sea)	-	Oussama	LIB
48	JNM	M	31-40	Cameroon	06/2025	NO	Nabeul	-	Characharah	LIB
49	NNM	F	41-50	Ivory Coast	06/2025	SI	Nabeul	-	Characharah	LIB
50	RKT	F	41-50	Cameroon	08/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	Ben Gardane	Characharah	LIB
51	LG	F	31-40	Cameroon	08/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	-	Characharah	LIB
52	BRH	M	21-30	Guinea	09/2025	NO	Monastir	Tataouine	Al Assah	LIB
53	FK	F	31-40	Ivory Coast	10/2025	NO	El Jem	Ben Gardane	Characharah	LIB
54	MFD	F	19-20	Guinea	10/2025	SI	Sfax (sea)	Tataouine	Characharah	LIB
55	MKH	M	21-30	Cameroon	10/2025	NO	El Jem	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	LIB
56	NDG	F	21-30	Ivory Coast	11/2025	NO	Sfax (olive groves)	Tataouine	Characharah	LIB
57	MMN	F	21-30	Guinea	04/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	Tataouine	-	LIB
58	LRN	F	U18	Cameroon	11/2025	NO	Tunisi	-	Abu Salim	LIB
59	DBR	F	U18	Cameroon	11/2025	NO	Tunisi	-	Abu Salim	LIB
60	LRS	F	19-20	Cameroon	11/2025	NO	Sfax	Tataouine	Al Assah	LIB
61	CRN	F	21-30	Cameroon	11/2025	NO	Sfax (city)	Ben Gardane	Al Assah	LIB
62	MHM	M	U18	Ivory Coast	12/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	Tataouine	-	LIB
63	FFN	F	21-30	Guinea	04/2025	NO	Sfax (sea)	Tataouine	-	LIB

[note] During the interviews, information about the precise route of expulsion did not always come to light. In such cases, witnesses often reported that they were hooded during their transport on buses and during the handover at the border.


Who are the witnesses?

INT.	NAME	SEX	AGE	COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN	WITH CHILDREN	PREGNANT	VICTIM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE	VICTIM OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION	WITNESSED SEXUAL VIOLENCE
31	FTM	F	21-30	Mali	●		●	●	●
32	PRT	M	31-40	Cameroon	●	✕			●
33	NS	F	21-30	Ivory Coast	●	●	●		●
34	NSJ	M	31-40	Ivory Coast	●	✕			●
35	RS	F	31-40	Cameroon			●	●	●
36	SLM	M	31-40	Guinea	●	✕			●
37	SK	M	31-40	Guinea	●	✕			●
38	MMD	M	U18	Guinea		✕			●
39	BSS	M	31-40	Benin		✕			●
40	MRT	F	21-30	Tchad	●	●	●	●	●
41	TTN	F	U18	Cameroon			●	●	●
42	MRL	F	31-40	Cameroon			●	●	●
43	SLMN	M	U18	Guinea		✕			●
44	YSS	M	21-30	Cameroon		✕			●
45	SND	F	21-30	Cameroon	●	●	●		●
46	BK	M	21-30	Guinea		✕			●
47	HGS	M	41-50	Cameroon	●	✕			●
48	JNM	M	31-40	Cameroon		✕			●
49	NNM	F	41-50	Ivory Coast		●	●		●
50	RKT	F	41-50	Cameroon			●	●	●
51	LG	F	31-40	Cameroon		●	●		●
52	BRH	M	21-30	Guinea		✕			●
53	FK	F	31-40	Ivory Coast	●		●		●
54	MFD	F	19-20	Guinea			●		●
55	MKH	M	21-30	Cameroon	●	✕			●
56	NDG	F	21-30	Ivory Coast			●		●
57	MMN	F	21-30	Guinea			●		●
58	LRN	F	U18	Cameroon			●	●	●
59	DBR	F	U18	Cameroon			●		●
60	LRS	F	21-30	Camerun			●		●
61	CRN	F	21-30	Cameroon	●		●		●
62	MHM	M	U18	Ivory Coast		✕			●
63	FFN	F	21-30	Guinea	●		●		●

LEGENDA = YES = NO



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The cycle of gender based violence along women State trafficking

1. Dehumanization

2. Rapes

3. Forced
prostitution



DEHUMANIZATION



1. Dehumanization

The testimonies we collected describe a range of violent practices that **significantly undermine the dignity and sanity of those subjected to them through public humiliation, threats, material deprivation, degrading rituals, and the denial of medical care.** The documented conduct of state agents outlines a context characterized by the annihilation of people's individual will, the destruction of their legal identity, and their systematic dehumanization.

On the Tunisian side, one of the primary examples of these violent practices are arbitrary arrests based on skin color, regardless of people's legal status, and without any formal measures depriving individuals of their freedom. Witnesses reported that they were detained in the streets, in gathering places or workplaces, in their homes, or following interceptions at sea. During these captures, numerous witnesses reported that they had their money and personal belongings stolen, as well as their identity documents (passports and/or international protection cards) deliberately destroyed. **It is worth emphasizing that the destruction or seizure of identity documents not only deprives people of their 'administrative existence', but it also makes it practically impossible for them to access any of their rights.**

Body searches are a recurring practice at various stages of people's apprehension, expulsion, and detention, and they constitute a clear form of humiliation.

Indeed, these searches take place in public, with no protection of privacy or personal dignity, and are accompanied by racist insults and epithets that liken people to animals or objects. **Men and women are forced to strip completely naked in front of everyone. The combined effect of bodily exposure, physical intrusion, and degrading language reduces people to mere objects at the mercy of others.**

During transportation to the border, people are restrained with plastic ties on their hands, sometimes also on their feet, and **forced to keep their heads down under threat;** they are deprived of water and food and prevented from attending to their bodily needs. Those who request information or assistance are punished with beatings. Several witnesses have reported that **transfers to the border between Tunisia and Libya took place in trucks that are normally used for transporting livestock,** which were described as closed vehicles lacking ventilation and sometimes soiled with waste and animal excrement.

Witness MHM (Int. 62) recounted their experience:

"In Tunisia, the truck I was in [during the expulsion] was large [...] it was full of rubbish... poo everywhere inside... they were used to transport animals, camels and cattle, so they put us in there; we were crammed into the back."

Detainees are crammed into cramped, windowless spaces, forced to travel standing up and unable to move. The lack of information about the destination and the fact that they cannot see where they are being taken contribute to a state of disorientation and terror among the people who are being trafficked.

Witness CRN (Int. 61) provided an example of this:

“ When we arrived at their prison, they took our fingerprints and asked us some questions about how we had entered Tunisia, which country we came from and, once we finished explaining, we spent three days there [...] on the third day, they put us on a bus, a long bus, to take us to yet another place, a big place near the border [...] the men were in the dogs’ cage [...] and (the GNT) were beating even injured people... there was a young man who was beaten until he was on the verge of death, then they took him away [...] the men weren’t eating, us women were mistreated, we ate at night [...] and they were filming us with their phones... They pointed their tasers at us... when we screamed, they pointed their tasers at us, then they started laughing [...]. ‘We’ll take you to Libya, we’ll sell you in Libya,’ they told us, as they laughed.”

In the border areas between Tunisia and Libya and in detention facilities, people were held in extreme conditions.

Witnesses reported that they were held in and saw spaces described as “cages” or metal enclosures, which were sometimes likened to dog kennels. They were forced to remain for hours or days in these overcrowded environments, exposed to the elements or locked up in hangars lacking ventilation and adequate sanitation facilities. Salt water or water intended for animals was often distributed to them. During some expulsion operations on the road between Medenine and the Dehiba/Wazzin border crossing, unidentified military hangars were used as places of torture, humiliation, and dehumanization.

During the sale, prisoners were often subjected to further searches, stripped naked, and publicly humiliated. The procedure was designed as a transaction in which the control and custody of people was transferred from the Tunisian authorities to the Libyan authorities.

Taken together, the practices described by witnesses constitute a coherent sequence of torture operations characterized by **a gradual erosion of personal dignity** by depriving people of their status, rights, and humanity. Thus, arbitrary arrests, the destruction of their documents, public body searches, transportation in degrading conditions, confinement in cage-like spaces and, finally, handover to armed state and

The Hangar of Tear Gas and Humiliation – Tunisia

Witness SLMN (Int. 43), a minor, reported that he was transferred from the port of Sfax to a reception and detention facility run by the GNT. During his stay there, he suffered and witnessed serious acts of violence and barbarity at the hands of uniformed officers. Upon arrival, the prisoners were taken to a windowless hangar. While they were confined in the hangar with 200 other people (women, men and children), tear gas was fired into the facility. Following exposure to the gas, several people lost consciousness and started to vomit. Despite repeated requests for assistance, the guards did not intervene.

During their detention, GNT guards would periodically enter the hangar and randomly select certain prisoners for humiliation, ordering them to sing or dance while they filmed them. Those who refused to do it were beaten. On other occasions, they would pair prisoners up and force them to fight each other while the scene was being filmed. The witness was forced to fight against a member of his own family; he also reported that, among the various humiliations he suffered, he was made to smoke while doing push-ups in front of the guards and inhale the smoke through his nostrils before being beaten. Subsequently, once he was transferred to the Libyan border to be sold, he was made to stage more fighting scenes with other prisoners “as if [they] were gladiators”.

non-state groups are not isolated incidents. They are **part of a single chain of events aimed at transforming people into commodities**, turning individuals with rights into captive bodies that can be transferred and exchanged. The testimonies converge in describing not only conditions of deprivation and extreme violence, but also the normalization of the commodification of human beings reduced to slavery.

What witness CRN (Int. 61) said reflects a narrative which is found in all interviews:

“When we arrived at the prison in Libya, we went in and discovered there were other people [...] The women said that they were there, that they were sold there a long time ago, and that they were being tortured. They didn’t eat or drink normally. Sometimes they were forced to drink the water running in the toilets because (the Libyan guards) only gave them that.”

The inhuman treatment inflicted by state agents also included **the absence or denial of medical and basic care, the deprivation of food and water, the total lack of access to medical treatment, and even the denial of medical assistance to pregnant women and minors**. In fact, in the context examined in the report, the absence of medical care is not just an unintended consequence of negligence or the result of a more general state of inefficiency, but rather it is a coercion method, bordering on torture, which is aimed at racialized individuals whose gender identity further increases their vulnerability.

Among the acts of violence reported by witnesses, there were also **numerous miscarriages caused by the conditions of deprivation suffered during capture and detention. Minors and infants were often held in hygienic conditions which were extremely hazardous for their health. The denial of obstetric and pediatric care has emerged as one of the most brutal forms of gender-based and generational violence, aimed at turning the mother-child bond into a powerful tool of psychological pressure**.

In Tunisia, the denial of medical care is directly attributable to the uniformed GNT personnel who are responsible for expulsion operations. The conditions in which expulsions from Tunisia to Libya take place – both on means of transportation and at transit points – are indicative of a general disregard for people’s health and human dignity. In Libya, **the lack of medical care for people who are being trafficked becomes systematic and prolonged, and their subjection to physical pain and torture is used to extort a ransom from their families**.

Witness RKT (Int. 50) said that:

“No doctor ever came in there, into our prison in Libya [...] We said we were ill, that our children were ill. I was ill, but I never saw anyone. I called the guards and said, ‘Excuse me, excuse me, I’m ill, I’d like a pill [...]’ but nothing.”

The situation in which children had to live is a particularly telling indicator of the inhumane detention conditions. **The lack of nappies as well as adequate food and drink, such as milk for infants, the fact that they only had access to contaminated water, and the unsanitary and overcrowded spaces in which they had to live are the norm in detention. In some cases, crying – the primary expression of need – was suppressed through beatings**. One mother told us that the combination of malnutrition and lack of care led to the death of her child after weeks of insufficient feeding.

Pregnancy represented a particularly critical condition, as physical vulnerability was compounded by violence inflicted in prison. **The testimonies documented systematic medical neglect: abdominal pain and contractions were ignored by prison staff, requests for medication or assistance went unanswered, and female prisoners were left to cope with serious medical emergencies, unwanted pregnancies, and miscarriage inside their cells, without any medical staff and with no one supporting them other than their fellow prisoners.** This context was also the main cause of several cases of psychological suffering, which remained equally undetected and untreated, further exacerbating the vulnerability caused by detention.

It is important to stress that all the testimonies we collected clearly show that the absence or denial of medical care did not constitute a failure in the attempt to provide service, but rather an intentional deprivation aimed at dehumanizing and commodifying prisoners.



RAPES



2. Rapes

Physical and sexual violence perpetrated by uniformed officers was systemic at every stage of the process, from the moment people were captured in Tunisia to their release from the various kinds of official and unofficial prisons in Libya. Furthermore, all the aforementioned forms of violence continued in the places where women were sexually exploited following detention. Albeit in different forms, **physical and sexual violence were documented by all the witnesses** who were interviewed by RR[X].

During interceptions at sea, many women reported that they were hit with big sticks; they documented cases of shipwrecks directly caused by the GNT in which people, including children, were left to die at sea without being rescued.

Several women reported that they were raped both when they were captured in the camps near the olive groves north of Sfax and in the detention facilities at the military port of Sfax. In the detention centers they were taken to following interceptions at sea or arbitrary arrests, women and minors were physically assaulted, subjected to beatings and physical abuse.

Sexual violence was widespread and was inflicted in the form of invasive body searches carried out exclusively by men in uniform, often in areas that were visible to everyone. Minors were also subjected to this kind of abuse, which was aimed at seizing any money or mobile phones they may be hiding on behalf of their mothers.

On the buses used to transport the people who were captured to Libya, physical violence was systematically used as a means of coercion; it served the purpose of preventing prisoners from recognizing the places they passed by, thwarting escape attempts, and stifling any form of collective resistance. **Many witnesses reported that they had had a hood put on them for the entire duration of the journey** and were hit on the head by the soldiers escorting the convoy every time they attempted to look up to get their bearings. **Women also report that, after being captured, they were handcuffed with plastic ties like their children.**

Sexual violence in the form of intimate searches also occurred during technical stops and during the hand-over of military teams responsible for escorting the buses.

Witnesses reported that at the GNT barracks (**particularly at the El Meguissem facility**), where people were held prior to being sold at the Libyan border, **there was a constant regime of violence. Victims reported that they were beaten and that they witnessed men being tortured, including using dogs and tasers.** Uniformed officers inflicted degrading treatment of all kinds, including sexual violence in the form of intimate searches and rape. In some cases, **women were held together with children in cages under high-voltage pylons and power lines**, while in other cases **they were segregated in separate detention areas.**

However, the regime of violence established in Tunisia did not stop at the border. It continued systematically in Libyan prisons and during transfers from one prison to another. Physical violence was systemic and searches frequently turned into sexual abuse. **Once they were trafficked to Libya, rapes by guards becomes a recurring experience for all the witnesses:** sexual assaults occurred on a daily basis, both inside detention centers and in external locations such as abandoned buildings near

prisons, where women were taken by force or by deception. **Sometimes the abuse was accompanied by the promise of freedom.** In many cases in which women suffered unwanted pregnancies, births took place in precarious or entirely unsanitary conditions. Past sexual violence, the lack of care, and inhumane treatment combined to produce a deliberate form of persecution.

Moreover, institutional violence broke up families along the routes of state-sponsored trafficking. An initial separation took place in Tunisian detention centers, where those who were deemed 'healthy' were sold off, while those who were considered 'sick' were abandoned or left to die.

Several interviewees reported that they witnessed the deaths of their fellow prisoners or had to carry their bodies. In particular, one witness reported that they saw a pit full of bodies from the Tunisian side of the border near the El Meguissem barracks, while **witness PRT (N. 32) reported that, since they presumed he was dead, he was thrown into a mass grave on the Libyan side in the area near the Al Assah prisons, from where he returned to Tunisia on foot.**

A second case of family separation occurred at the Bir Al Ghanam prison in Libya, where men were held, while women and children were transferred to the Characharah detention center ⁽¹⁵⁾, whereas the Al Assah detention centers handled the payment of ransoms for both male and female prisoners, sending released prisoners to the city of Zwara.

Physical violence against women and children was used to psychologically break people and make them compliant; it was carried out by guards and uniformed officers as a tool of domination, to ensure control and the profitability of trafficking operations. **One witness reported the use of gunshots to their feet and killings carried out by the GNT during escape attempts at the Dehiba border crossing** while people were being sold.

Rapes and gender-based violence must be considered to be, in every respect, forms of torture; the sexual assaults perpetrated against women, which intensified during transfers from Tunisia to Libya, were part of a broader dynamic involving the exercise of power and the **dehumanization of people, who were reduced to disposable bodies.**

Finally, it is important to highlight that **violence against women was often deliberately inflicted in open spaces and in front of other prisoners. Husbands, fathers, and sons were forced to watch and, as 'spectators', they suffered indirect and psychological violence, which multiplied the traumatic effect.** Being a minor did not, however, seem to offer any protection: **children were regularly exposed to these practices and suffered the consequences of this.** Based on the testimonies we collected, only two categories appeared to be partially spared from direct sexual violence: **women in advanced stages of pregnancy and newborns.** Neither group, however, was safe from physical violence, which was perpetrated with similar regularity on both sides of the border.

^[15] Named by female prisoners, this prison is located in Tripoli at a site that is difficult to identify with certainty by those who were detained there. Some mention the presence of a mosque along Sharia al Jala Road, an area with many public offices, including several DCIM facilities. Other witnesses say it is the Ghut Al Shaal prison. This prison, like those of Al Assah and Bir Al Ghanam, is under the control of the Zintan militias, which also control the Libyan Coast Guard.

MFD's testimony (Int. 54) recounts the ordeal of violence endured by many women, from their interception at sea by the GNT to their detention in Libya:

"They captured us on October 20, 2025 (at sea). It was Tunisians on small boats. We refused to board; they beat us, they mistreated us, they beat us, they beat us in the water. Yes, yes, there were people screaming; there were children with us. The Tunisians started to create a wake until our boat capsized. There were 42 of us. It was them, the National Guard. 26 survivors and 16 dead that day. [...] The people who drowned, yes, they were left in the water. The National Guard... they were the ones who could have saved them. They could have picked them up, like they did with us. (At the port of Sfax) you couldn't speak, they searched us, they took everything we were wearing, they beat men. And it was the same for women; if we spoke, they beat us. Women weren't raped there, but when we were sold to the Libyans... that's when they raped us. There were so many of us, the bus was full; there were five buses. [...] The bus was white with green stripes.

[...] They switched police teams. They made us get off near Tataouine. They beat us. People were crying and there was nothing – no food, no water, nothing. Their police chief was there. They beat us, they beat us with their batons, and they hit us on the head with those. They hit everything, they didn't even think about it, even on the bus. I don't know, I don't know (how long I was in Tataouine for). (At the Libyan border) Then they made us all kneel down, as we got off the bus. They exchanged something, they signed, we saw them, they signed, they were talking among themselves, they signed a document. We were on our knees. There were loads of them (police officers); there were others who came and beat us from behind.[...] There were two buses to Libya. Many police officers and soldiers, more than 100 people.

They were all guards, it was terrible. The Tunisians were wearing black uniforms, black clothes. The Libyans... khaki clothes. Their faces were covered. Then they locked us in a truck, it was crazy, we couldn't see anything outside. People who were taken to Libya were sold. We saw for ourselves that they sold us for money. We saw money being exchanged at the border between Libya and Tunisia. We got off the bus. (The Libyans) were outside waiting. They didn't have a bus. It was like... a van, tightly locked with... with chains. Yes, yes, it wasn't a truck, it was a small car, but they put human beings in it, as if they had been putting animals in it [...] It was all locked up, we couldn't see a thing. No windows, nothing at all, people were screaming and banging on the door.

Once we arrived at the Al Assah prison in Libya, the women were subjected to violence. When we made a noise, the guards came and beat us. Yes, yes. At night they raped us; they came, they called us, "come on, let's go outside." They did whatever they wanted to us. Yes, it happened to me too, many times; I even have the evidence (on my body)[...] Yes, there was another room there (inside the prison). Yes, they raped us; the guard came in, told us to go. They said they'd set us free, that if we gave ourselves to them they'd set us free, but when they were done, they put us back inside.

Rapes

(Int. 62 – MHM)

“They came to us... We weren't in blue (international) waters yet; the National Guard arrived on a small boat. They rammed into our boat and people started falling into the water; eight people died. They watched people drown and those [of us] who didn't drown were put on their boat. From there we were transferred to the big boat and taken to the port of Sfax. They put us on a bus to the border with Libya. There were 42 of us.”

(Int. 56 – NDG)

“I was sleeping in the olive groves, at km 18 (north of Sfax). The police came and handcuffed us, even children. They beat us, they thrashed us... Men, women, everyone was beaten. We were sleeping, it was 4 o'clock in the morning. They didn't even spare pregnant women or children. They were in uniform, it was the National Guard. They put us on three buses heading to Libya. We were sitting on the floor, we couldn't look out. We were traumatized, we were crying. If you asked a question, they'd hit you to shut you up; if you cried, they'd slap you. [...] Then the Tunisians made us get off (the buses). Our faces were still covered. They made us lie on the ground. All around was the desert. It was windy, you could hear the wind. There were some antennas far away from us. We were handcuffed. At night they came to get us. They beat us. They told us... “get in, get in... in the cars.” You couldn't see a thing. We had hoods on our heads [...] In the prison in Libya, later on, at night, every night the guards would come to get the women; they'd grab us violently. Me too. They took us out, three or four women. Then they put us back in the cell. I spent four nights there. I was crying, I was screaming. They let me out secretly. It was a Libyan man who worked in the prison who let me out. He was young. He didn't take advantage of me. During the day the guards came and let us make a phone call to our families. If we had no one to call, they beat us. That's why I fell ill. There was a black man who worked for them as a translator. I was released from prison two weeks ago.”

(Int. 41 – TTN)

“When we arrived at the first prison (Al Assah, in Libya), they used violence, searched us, and took everything we had. If you had a phone, they took it. They took our clothes. [...] They searched us and stripped us naked. They put their hands on us, touched us, searched us – perhaps because they thought we were hiding something. That night, the women who were already in prison were raped, but we weren't raped that time. [...] When we arrived in Characharah, they let us in. There were only women and children; there were no men. When we arrived, they searched us again. We had nothing left; they had taken everything we had. We found other women and children [...] They'd take the women – perhaps two or three at a time – and go out, saying that those women were going to fetch food and water for everyone, and every time these women returned, they told us they'd been raped. (The guards) would enter the hall, point at us, and say: “You, get up. You, get up. You, get up.” That's how it was. And we had no say in it when they pointed at us; we got up. If we didn't want to get up, they'd pull us up by force. They raped my aunt. When they asked her to get up, it was about 6 pm... when they took her away, far away to a place where there were some unfinished houses in which nobody lived. They took her there, they raped her... There was only one man who raped her... then, when he finished, he told her to get dressed, and they went to buy apples and bread for the prisoners.”

(Int. 55 – MKT)

“(The Libyan guards) in Al Assah separated me from my family. They took me to another prison far away. It was all made of sheet metal. There were over a thousand of us, all men. Every morning they whipped us. I spent two weeks there. It was pure torture. Yes, some people died. I had to find my family. [...]. The dead bodies were thrown wherever. I just wanted to find a way to be reunited with my family. They forced me to throw the bodies away. I was released in January 2025.”

Rapes

(Int. 42 – MRL)

"(In the first prison in Libya) the guards searched the children, looking for phones; they searched them to see if they could find anything in their diapers. [...] They touched the women's private parts. They were wearing gloves. The searches took place in the courtyard, then they made you get dressed. This happened in front of everyone and in front of the other prisoners; that's how it was, even for the men. [...] Then, in Characharah, they searched us again. They stripped us completely naked, in front of everyone. Same scenario. They were wearing gloves and searched us internally as well. The guards carrying out the searches were armed. [...] The guards would always come, saying they wanted three women for a job and that when they returned they'd bring bread and food. They took us to an abandoned house; there were three of us. There they raped us. The men took us to a corner. They took me and abused me and the other women, and when they were done they took us back to prison. It happened twice. So, broadly speaking, every day there were women who were chosen, who were taken out to be raped. When we didn't want to do it, they used force, they mistreated us. They didn't take children or pregnant women. They had a list of pregnant women. Like my sister H., they'd left her pregnant in the brothel down there, but she'd gotten pregnant in prison"

(Int. 49 – NNM)

"(At the port of Sfax) they beat us and they put us on the bus... They weren't proper handcuffs. No, they were plastic ties. [...] The boys had their arms behind their backs, and their feet were tied up; us women had our feet tied up, too. [...] (On the tarmac road on the way to Libya), they stopped and put dirty rags in our mouths. If we screamed, they didn't want anyone to hear us. The Tunisian guards did what they wanted, they raped us. When we arrived (at the border with Libya), there was a large pit [...] they dumped us all out of the cars, trucks, and buses; there was a large pit [...] If anyone moved, they'd killed them and throw them into the pit. [...] Then they traded us between Tunisia and Libya in exchange for petrol"

(Int. 45 – SND)

"I was in the zitounes (olives groves) in Sfax. I'm a minor and I have a son. The police raped us in the zitounes in May. They traumatized me. I had tears in my eyes. The baby was born as a result of being raped. It was the National Guard; they raped women and stole our phones. They arrested us at km 19. They kidnapped us and took us to the port of Sfax. They beat us and tortured us. They handcuffed us. I was already pregnant... There were other people at the port. At the port of Sfax, they raped the women again. They took the women and put them in another room [...] At the border, they sold us to the Libyans. It took about thirty minutes to make the exchange. There were more than 70 of us. The National Guard took us to the place where they made the exchange. The Libyans were wearing black uniforms. They sold us in exchange for jerrycans of fuel. Some people died during the exchange. Those who were trying to escape were shot in the feet. It was the Libyans; they shot people. They left their bodies in the desert. Then they took us to a prison on a truck, it was a large prison. [...] I was with my partner, but we were separated at the Brigadem prison (Bir Al Ghanam). They took me to Characharah, in Tripoli. There were lots of people. The Arabs arrived to buy us, the guards tortured us, demanding huge ransoms. I couldn't pay. I was pregnant, I was crying. [...] Some women were tortured"

(Int. 31 – FTM)

"(In Sfax) the police came to arrest us after smashing everything. I don't know how it happened, they raped us. Do you understand? During a police raid in the zitounes (olives groves), police officers raped the women, including my daughter, who got pregnant[...] Yes, they came at us, yes[...] I didn't know what to do; they beat me and I wanted to defend my daughter, who was raped"

Rapes

(Int. 61 – CRN)

"The GNT's rubber dinghy capsized our boat [...] many died in the water, the soldiers watched people die [...] They created a wake [...] that's how water got into our boat. They capsized it. We found ourselves in the water, we begged for help, but they didn't want to help us. There were children crying, there were other people who couldn't make it, there were people shouting "help us", they were standing right there laughing. Nobody wanted to help us; there were people, there were children, children crying. They made fun of us, they insulted us. [...] They looked at us, but nobody wanted to help us. [...] We remained in the water, we remained like that for at least 30 minutes, waiting for the big Tunisian Coastguard ship to arrive. [...] Many people died. Many children and pregnant women died [...] At the port of Sfax, they beat us women, pulled our hair, pushed us, grabbed us. They squeezed us so hard that we could have fainted instantly. They threatened us so much that we cried, we begged.

We begged and they refused. When women said they were with children, they wouldn't listen to them. They made it clear that they'd kill us. They told us we had no right to be in Tunisia. The National Guard beat people—they beat men, they beat women. If a child cried, they would come and beat [their mother]. There were other members of the National Guard who touched our breasts, our bottoms... they put their fingers inside us, they asked us to undress [...]

In the desert prison in Tunisia (El Meguissem), they separated men and women [...] At night they came back several times. They touched us everywhere... they stuck their fingers inside us. (once we arrived in Libya, in the Al Assah prison) sometimes they beat us, sometimes they raped us. Sometimes, there were others who [...] tried to take us from behind [...] because there was a small shower in the room.

That's where it all happened [...]

I went through this"

(Int. 51 – LG)

"At the port of Sfax, they arrived and searched us all over... they touched our breasts, they touched our bottoms, and they touched us everywhere... but they were always looking for money and our phones. On the bus (to Libya)... they searched us, they beat us and, when they touched me and I resisted, then they beat me harder. During the journey (a guard) came to touch my bottom and did it in a rough way because I wouldn't let him... I didn't want him to, so they beat me... and then they didn't want me to lift my head because they didn't want us to see where they were taking us... and this went on for the whole journey, you see, maybe for the four hours we spent traveling on the bus they beat us and touched us. Even in the prison in Libya they raped women, not the pregnant ones. But they raped all the others"



**FORCED
PROSTITUTION**



3. Forced prostitution

When captives were transferred to Libya they fell into debt with prisons' owners (Libyan military and/or militias); to repay this, insolvent men and women were pushed to perform work, including prostitution, which was always forced.

Unlike men, who may have been forced to work for limited periods of time in prison (generally between four and six months), **women were often transferred to houses which were used for sexual exploitation (referred to in the testimonies as 'brothels')**.

Two key figures emerged from the testimonies; they were involved both in the negotiations prior to people's release from prison and in those leading to other forms of detention and exploitation. The first is that of **the sub-Saharan intermediary**, who were other migrants from the same communities as the prisoners but could also speak Arabic; this allowed them to understand the language and cultural codes of both enslaved people and their captors. They were generally people who had also been detained and had carved out a role for themselves in the various kinds of Libyan prisons. The second is **the private buyer (in most cases a Libyan citizen)**, who stepped in when a trafficked person did not have a family or social network that could cover the ransom, took charge of their debt and took control of their will. In some cases, it was sub-Saharan intermediaries who helped to identify Libyan buyers, thereby contributing to prisoners entering forced labor and enslavement.

This process of negotiation and exchange between guards and external parties is referred to as

barnamiche. This was the stage at which the details of a transaction were finalized, including the number of people involved, the conditions, the price, the selection, and how they were going to be transferred from the prison. The extent to which this process had become normalized was given away by the public nature of the exchange, which was carried out in the presence of other prisoners, as well as the language they used ("buying" or "paying for freedom"), which is typical of an overt commercial transaction.

Reduction to labor slavery - Libya

Witness HGT, a young woman, spoke to us while she was still subject to debt-bonded labor; she was mainly carrying out domestic work in the homes of Libyans. From the Characharah prison, she was forced to move to and reside in Zawia, where she came across many men and women in the same situation. The buyer who had paid the guards in advance, whom she identified as a Togolese man named Oumar, was involved in the systematic purchase of people that he subsequently made available in the local labor market. Men were employed in construction and agriculture, while women carried out domestic work, and both were forced to hand over their full wages to their exploiters. HGT stated that she had to work for an estimated period of four months to pay off a 7,000 dinar debt; in the event of failure to repay her debt, the obligation to work would persist until the sum had been repaid in full. She stated that her freedom of movement was restricted, as she was only allowed to leave her place of residence under escort or supervision, with pre-set time limits. Even the purchase of basic necessities, including products for her newborn son, took place under escort.

Here is an extract from her interview:

HGT said: "Sometimes we don't work on Fridays; the employer comes in his car and asks us if we want to go out somewhere. He takes me in his car."

RR[X] asked her: "So, even if you're in a state of slavery, he gives you a few hours of freedom?"

HGT answered: "Yes, on Fridays, only on Fridays."

RR[X] asked her: "And what if you get sick?"

HGT said: "They have their own doctors, and we go there accompanied."

The *barnamiche* is such a well-established process that it was supported by the advertising of ‘catalogues’ of human beings for sale. Libyan prison guards often used images of female prisoners to facilitate their selection by potential buyers. Several witnesses cited in this report stated that they were photographed or filmed inside the prisons of Al Assah and Characharah for the purpose of their sale.

Women who were bought in bulk at the Tunisian border were thus resold on the retail market in Libya. The prices paid for them, at every stage of the trafficking chain, were consistently higher than those paid for men, which points to the existence of a market for forced prostitution in Libya.

The testimonies we collected indicate that the women who were purchased were not released but **transferred to forced labor detention facilities or forced prostitution houses run by Libyan or Nigerian nationals.**

In most cases, the women who were sold were unaware of the price that had been paid for them, which may have been quantified in the **number of months’ work required to pay off their ‘debt’.** Generally, it was only once they had been transferred to the houses where they were forced into prostitution that the women realized that their freedom had to be earned through prostitution for a period of time that was neither agreed on nor known to them. **Their purchase and enslavement were ‘temporary’ but not clearly quantifiable.**

The conditions in which sexual exploitation takes place in these houses are the following: freedom **deprivation, constant surveillance, compulsory provision of sexual services (with clients attending every day), payments made directly to exploiters by clients, no remuneration for the women, and the systematic use of threats and violence to force them into prostitution.**

From prison to forced prostitution: the inner workings of ‘brothels’ – Libya

In Libya, forced prostitution is a systemic element of a broader economy of exploitation and debt bondage. Below are two descriptions of ‘brothels’ where the witnesses who contributed to the report had spent time.

Brothel 1. Several women previously detained in the Charachara prison described their forced transfer to a facility used for prostitution in the town of Zawia. They described a private house located in a well-lit populated urban area. The house was accessed via a gate, and it was a medium-to-large-sized building with six rooms, each assigned to one woman. The rooms were sparsely furnished, with mattresses on the floor, blankets, and fans. Upon arrival, the women who were going to be forced into sexual exploitation were informed by other women of the actual purpose of those premises. Management was in the hands of two or three men, including at least one Libyan national, who constantly surveilled the women. Every morning, a designated person collected the money. The women were not allowed to leave the premises, seek medical care independently or purchase basic necessities. Any refusal of or resistance to forced prostitution resulted in severe reprisals, including physical violence and threats with weapons. Clients had access to the premises at any time. Payment was made on entry, then the client would choose a woman and a room.

Brothel 2. In the town of Zawia, in the Djama Sabah (Jemmah Sabah) district, there is a very large and well-known brothel, located along the town’s main street and a short distance from one of the main mosques in the area. It was described as a large building, surrounded by walls, with a large gate that was always closed and guarded. The building had several levels, and consisted of around fifty rooms. Inside, there were also some small areas which were used for serving alcoholic drinks to clients. The building was owned by a Libyan national, while day-to-day management appeared to be entrusted to individuals of sub-Saharan origin, particularly Nigerians. Single exploiters, known as ‘boga’, rented rooms to house the women who were under their control. Each group of women was controlled by a specific exploiter. The main entrance was under constant surveillance. Inside, there were women of various African nationalities. The number of women was very high and difficult to estimate. Payment for services was made at the entrance, after a woman had been selected. The advertised rates were 30 Libyan dinars for single service and 100 dinars for a whole night. Prostitution took place both day and night. Among the most serious concerns that were reported was the presence of underage girls (aged 16–17) and young children – the children of the women who were being sexually exploited. The living conditions described by witnesses pointed to a state of severe neglect. Women who were controlled by the same exploiter slept in communal areas on mattresses laid on the floor. The women had no freedom of movement and could not leave the premises on their own. According to the testimonies we collected, some women arrived directly from Nigeria, whilst others appeared to have been sold in and transferred from prisons to this house where they were forced into prostitution to pay off their debt to the buyer.

In all the documented cases, part of the proceeds was deducted to cover food or medical expenses, further prolonging the duration of forced prostitution. Thus, being transferred to a brothel did not constitute an escape from the detention system, but rather a continuation of that regime in a different form. In some cases, **to ensure a constant turnover and sustain client demand, women were transferred or resold to other brothels.** Finally, prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancies was rarely guaranteed.

Minors, including children and adolescents, were sometimes present in these settings and were directly exposed to the violence that was being perpetrated there. One witness reported that she was sold to two different brothels (in Sebha and Zuara) while her eight-year-old sister was with her, forced to witness every abuse. When the witness refused to prostitute herself, she was coerced under threat of her little sister being subjected to the same treatment.

Of the 19 women who were interviewed by RR[X], 7 were forced into prostitution as a condition of their release from detention. For single women with no family support and who were not visibly pregnant, forced labor appeared to be unavoidable. In some cases, they were able to get out of prison either by escaping on their own or with the help of Libyan guards who facilitated their escape, either out of altruism or in exchange for sexual favors.

In addition to sexual exploitation, those who are bought and released from prison would sometimes get caught in traditional labor exploitation. In these cases, **private citizens acted as temporary employment agencies and distributed the purchased prisoners—men and women—across local labor markets** as available workforce reduced to slavery and bound by debt.

Taken together, the testimonies outline **an organised, stable and recurring system in which freedom is turned into a commodity and debt serves as a tool for prolonged control; a state of subjugation that does not end with formal detention, but extends it through a logistical chain that directly links expulsions (from Tunisia) with the forced (sexual) labour markets in Libya** in a continuum of commodification, violence and exploitation.

Forced prostitution

(Int. 45 – SND)

"In Characharah there were many rooms. I had no money; I couldn't work or eat. Inside there were a window and an iron door. There were no mattresses, just rugs on the floor. Outside there was a courtyard. Sometimes we were allowed to go out. We drank water from the drain of the only toilet. There were many children and pregnant women. They gave us bread and cheese to eat. I have no family. I had no money for the ransom. There were Arabs who came in to buy women. I cried and cried. I was pregnant; I had a stomachache. A cop, a bandit, took pity on me."

(Int. 41 – TTN)

"Two months later, it was May 6 more or less[...] On that day they singled us out. There were three of us. Well, they'd found my aunt and two other women. I wasn't there. When they came out, they spoke. There were some Arabs and there was a black man, too. He told them he wanted to help us and that maybe he'd get us out... and my aunt said: "No, I have a daughter, I can't leave without her. If you want to help me, if you want to set me free, I can't leave without her." He said: "OK, no problem. How old is she?" My aunt told him my age, so he said: "OK, no problem. She can come." I didn't want to leave, but he told me I could relax and that there was someone who wanted to free us. So, someone paid to get us out of there. He was a Nigerian man. I didn't know him. He didn't tell us his name. But people called him Shibane. He paid to free me, my aunt, and another woman, because they wanted to buy three women. The other one was very young, she must have been twenty, I think. My aunt was 38. I was 16. The Nigerian man paid 500,000 dinars for three women."

(Int. 42 – MRL)

"Someone had offered to get us out if we didn't have any money. They'd offered to cover the difference if we were short of money. Women cost more. To get us out, you know... There was a guard who had come to pick me up to sell me to a man. Once I got there, I started crying and he asked me why I was crying. So, I decided to tell him my story. I asked if they could help me, I told them I was with my daughter, that I was tired, tired of this torture, of this life we lead. But then, you know... the Nigerian man... he tricked us by telling us we'd be working in an Arab man's house, washing dishes and taking the children to school to pay off our debt. People knew him... they called him Shibane Abram. We thought he wanted to help us and from the way he'd explained the procedure... he said he'd find us a job, that we'd work for maybe two months and that, after two months, we could have stopped working. And that would allow us to be set free. It would have been a way to pay back his money. So, this Nigerian man negotiated our release and told us: "I'll pay for you, I'll make you work for me, then I'll set you free." When we arrived [...] we found three other girls there; they explained to us that it was a brothel, that we'd be forced into prostitution, and that we couldn't resist because, if we did, they'd mistreat us. They threatened us with weapons. They just kept a close watch on us. [...] Clients paid before entering, to choose a room and a girl!"

(Int. 31 – FTM)

"That night, the Arab who'd bought me to do domestic work came into the room and[...] well[...] he wanted me to be his wife. I couldn't do anything else!"

Forced prostitution

(Int. 40 – MRT)

"The Libyans came into the prison and talked to the police, then they came to us, looked at us and said: "I'll take that one or I'll take the other one." They beat us up, we had no choice. Sometimes women were photographed and the guards gave these photos to the Arabs to sell us. They did that, too. They took photos of us, then they sent the photos to the Libyan customers. They took photos of me. We didn't see any money there. They lined the girls up one after the other, 8 people, 10 people in the same room. There was a guard and the Libyans came in, like that, and said: "No, I'm not interested" or "Yes, I'll take that one." So, they had their little show... They undressed us... they stripped us naked for sex and told you "suck it... take it in your mouth". They actually did things like that. They didn't explain anything to us. The man said "that's the woman I want". On the first day I had some doubts. They beat me very badly. But then... there was no food, there was nothing. We were forced to do it."

(Int. 53 – FK)

"In Characharah and in other Libyan prisons there was a middleman, an Arab named Moussa. (The guards would tell us): "Here comes an Arab who wants to buy you; you can go work for him for six months, then you can leave. After that, you'll be free." The work is different for men and women. For most women, the work consists solely of sex. Because at first they told us that we'd be going to work in people's homes. But when we arrived at the houses, we realized it wasn't domestic work, but prostitution. We saw the buyers come into the courtyard (of the prison), talk to the guards, then leave with other girls or men. It happened in front of everyone".

(Int. 50 – RKT)

"There are people who came to the prison and told us: "We can get you out if you want to go to work and earn money for your release." Working means prostitution. This is how it worked: there were Libyan guards, but the guards would let in black people who talked to us and told us that if we didn't have money, we'd have to prostitute ourselves. It was also the Arab (guard) who said, "I'll find you someone and you're going to work for him as a prostitute." They were the people who came to do the barnamiche, they came into the prison, bought [women], and did their business. They were friends of the Arabs, of the guards. [...] They offered to buy us if we didn't have the money to get out. If we wanted to stay in prison for a long time, all we had to do was withdraw from this trade... but we couldn't get out without paying. Of course, we could always say, "No, no, I don't want to."

(int. 54 – MFD)

"The guards came in (into the cells), took the women and photographed them, then they sold them to other people. When we were inside, the Arab would arrive with a photo of a girl, he'd show it to the other people who were watching, and they'd offer to take her. If we wanted to leave, we'd leave; we'd say it was us and that we accepted. If we didn't want to, we'd go away. At times, our photo would be shown by the guards. It may also be shown by a black man who acted as a middleman between the guards and someone close to us, and so on, and he'd pay to set us free, or it may be shown by an Arab to another Arab who would buy us to resell us."

Forced prostitution

(Int. 44 – YSS)

"The women who didn't have money to leave prison were sent to a brothel. They were bought. They sent them to Nganda, that's what they called it. It was a hotel in the Zouaia district called Jemmah Sabba, near the grand mosque. It was a brothel for everyone, arabs and blacks. It was run by Nigerians and was located near a police station and a bridge. The women worked for 6 or 7 months, then they were released after repaying the money that was used to buy them. I know this well, I lived in that city for 4 years. The women were locked up, they couldn't go out. There were children there, too. [...] Here in Libya, black people are treated like slaves"

(Int. 58 – LRN)

"I was in prison in Zwara. They sold me and took me to a brothel in that town. I don't know exactly where I was because, you know, they didn't let us go out. They just put us in a house, in a room, a small room. I worked there for four months. So, even if we protested because we didn't want to work or whatever, nobody could help us. I'd say there were 12 rooms, it was a normal house, but there were many women there, you know? I'd say I had something like 5 or 6 clients a day. They never gave me any money. They'd call me and I'd serve the client. This house was run by men and women, but they didn't show their faces. They wore masks, something like that. The owner always had his face covered, because that way we couldn't identify people. It was terrible. And it was the same for clients. Sometimes they'd give us food, but only if we worked. They beat us, too. And they told me that if I didn't do it, they'd take my little eight-year-old sister instead"

(Int. 35 – RS)

"I didn't get sick in prison in Libya. I got sick right after I was released. I had a very severe case of malaria. Women who got sick in prisons in Libya had no access to treatment. I ended up in the Oussama prison after the Tunisians sold us to the Libyans. I was there for a month. Personally, I didn't experience any physical or sexual violence there, but the conditions of detention were appalling; the hygiene conditions were terrible (no access to drinking water, a single filthy toilet for all the detainees – more than 40 or 50). Personally, I didn't suffer abuse or harassment, but other prisoners there were raped. Every day, the guards would come looking for two or three women to rape. The guards took photos of the women in prison and sent the images out; it is precisely those photos that were used by the Arabs who came to buy [women]. In this prison, I was sold; after a month in prison, a Libyan guard handed me over to a Libyan man who then gave me to a black man. No one asked for my consent. I saw the money being exchanged when the Arab handed me over to the black man, who took me to the brothel without my knowledge and against my will. The brothel was in Zwara. I was forced into prostitution there for a month. This brothel was run by this black man and a woman, both of Nigerian origin. There were thirty of us in total. I was the only Cameroonian; many of the girls were Nigerian. The clients were all Arabs. I had no say in the client or the price. I had to accept everything. All the money was collected by the owners, who had other 'businesses', so sometimes they would also take me outside the brothel to do other jobs, such as domestic work, or take me to a client's home. At the end of these jobs, I was taken back to the brothel by the owners. This is how I paid off my debt and was allowed to leave."



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Based on the evidence gathered in the first State Trafficking report, two appeals have been submitted to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights against the Republic of Tunisia, with legal support from ASGI. These proceedings are based on the direct testimonies of the victims (RS - int. 35 and SLM - int. 36) and aim to establish the Tunisian state's responsibility for the systematic practices of arbitrary detention, violence, collective expulsion, and the sale of human beings to Libyan exploitation networks, carried out by its own security apparatus. With this report, RR[X] expands and consolidates the body of evidence, providing new testimonies that allow for a deeper examination (in particular of the gender dimension of the violations), focusing the legal and political attention on a structural system of human rights denial.

Applications before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

(ed. ASGI)

Case 1:
Witness R.E.L.T.S.
against Republic of Tunisia

Case 2:
Witness S.D.
against Republic of Tunisia

Introduction and Strategic Context

The two applications arise from testimonies collected within the **State Trafficking** investigative and documentation project, which identified a structural pattern of racially-targeted enforcement operations perpetrated by Tunisian authorities against Sub-Saharan migrants since 2022–2023, involving arbitrary detention, torture, collective expulsion, and active State collaboration with Libyan trafficking networks.

Both applicants — **R.E.L.T.S.** (Case 1) and **S.D.** (Case 2) — are currently residing in safety in Italy. Having survived and escaped the violations described, they have voluntarily agreed to lend their names to these proceedings, in full awareness of their legal significance. The two cases pursue a dual objective: obtaining individual redress for each applicant and generating authoritative jurisprudence on Tunisia's international responsibility for a systematic, racially-targeted migration enforcement policy.

Jurisdictional urgency. Tunisia deposited its withdrawal of the Article 34(6) declaration on 7 March 2025. Pursuant to the Court's jurisprudence, the withdrawal takes effect on **8 March 2026** and does not affect cases filed before that date. Both applications were introduced within the operative jurisdictional window.

Jurisdictional and Normative Framework

Tunisia ratified the African Charter on 16 March 1983, the Protocol on 21 August 2007, and accepted individual access jurisdiction (Art. 34(6)) on 16 April 2017. The applicable normative framework comprises: the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights** (Arts. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12(5), 16, 18); the **Maputo Protocol** (Arts. 2, 4 — Case 1 only); the **UN Convention Against Torture** (CAT, Arts. 1–3); the **ICCPR** (Arts. 6, 7, 9, 13, 26); and **CEDAW** (Art. 6 — Case 1 only).

CASE 1. R.E.L.T.S. against Republic of Tunisia

Applicant: R.E.L.T.S., Cameroonian national.

Period of violations: March 2023 – June 2024 (primary: April–May 2024).

Current status: residing in Italy; international protection proceedings pending.

Statement of Facts

Background and trafficking.

In March 2023, R. departed Cameroon after being lured by a fraudulent promise of housing and transport. She was immediately subjected to deception and coercion, falling victim to a trafficking network and forced into sexual labour. She was transported through Nigeria, Niger, and Algeria — where she was detained for two weeks in Tamanrasset — before entering Tunisia, where she remained for approximately one year.

Sea crossing and arrest (1 May 2024).

R. attempted a sea crossing to Italy; the vessel broke apart. Rescued by a fisherman, she was arrested by the Tunisian National Guard, handcuffed, transferred to a desert military camp, and confined in a cage for **21 days** without food, water, or sanitation, subject to constant physical violence.

Transfer to Libya and further trafficking.

Following the detention, she and other migrants were transported to the Libyan border and **sold to Libyan authorities** by Tunisian National Guard personnel. She was imprisoned at Zwara for one month, then sold to a so-called "*connection house*", where she was forced into sexual labour under conditions of confinement and medical deprivation.

Alleged Violations

Norm / Right	Factual Basis
Art. 4 Charter · Art. 6 ICCPR · Art. 4 Maputo Right to Life	21-day desert detention life-threatening by nature; sea crossing without rescue; transfer to Libya where lethal risk is foreseeable.
Art. 5 Charter · CAT Arts. 1–3 Prohibition of Torture & CIDT	Physical violence; deprivation of food and water; caging; coerced sexual labour — systematic and severe ill-treatment.
Art. 6 Charter · Art. 9 ICCPR Arbitrary Detention	Arrest and detention without legal basis, charge, or access to any judicial remedy.
Art. 12(5) Charter · Art. 13 ICCPR Collective Expulsion & Non-Refoulement	Mass transfer to Libyan border with no individual assessment; handover to known torturers — direct refoulement.
Art. 18 Charter · Art. 4 Maputo · Art. 6 CEDAW Prohibition of Trafficking	Active sale to Libyan authorities and to a connection house; failure to protect a known trafficking victim.
Art. 2 Charter · Arts. 2, 26 ICCPR · Maputo Racial & Gender Discrimination	Enforcement exclusively targeting Sub-Saharan migrants; compounded vulnerability as a woman subject to gender-based violence.
Art. 16 Charter Right to Health / Art. 7 Charter Fair Hearing	Denial of food, water, and medical care; total impossibility of accessing courts throughout the period of violation.

Remedies Sought

The applicant requests, pursuant to Art. 27 of the Protocol and the reparation principles established in *Zongo et al. v. Burkina Faso* (2015):

- **Declarations of violation** of Arts. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12(5), 16, 18 African Charter; Arts. 2 & 4 Maputo Protocol; CAT Arts. 2–3; ICCPR Arts. 6, 7, 9, 13, 26; CEDAW Art. 6.
- **Compensation:** € 50,000 (moral damage: arbitrary detention, torture, psychological trauma, loss of dignity, gender-based harm); € 5,000 (legal and procedural costs). Ref.: *Alex Thomas v. Tanzania* (2015); *Konaté v. Burkina Faso* (2016).
- **Non-repetition guarantees:** legislative reforms compliant with the African Charter and international refugee law; independent monitoring of detention facilities; accountability mechanisms for forces involved in violations.
- **Satisfaction:** official public apology recognising the violations; implementation report to the Court within 6 months, with periodic compliance reporting.

Admissibility

Non-exhaustion of domestic remedies — justification. Domestic remedies were unavailable due to: the applicant's extreme vulnerability; direct involvement of security forces in the violations; absence of any information on available procedures; material indigence; and forcible expulsion from Tunisian territory. The application was introduced within a reasonable time having regard to the gravity of the violations and the applicant's continuing administrative instability in Italy. No prior submission to any international body has been made.

CASE 2. S.D. against Republic of Tunisia

Applicant: S.D., Guinean national.

Period of violations: July – August 2024 (primary: Sfax port and desert border zone).

Current status: reception centre near Florence; international protection proceedings pending.

Statement of Facts

Sea crossing attempt (July 2024).

Already present in Tunisia, S.D. joined a group of **46 persons** attempting a sea crossing to Italy. The vessel drifted for **five days** without any rescue intervention by Tunisian authorities, despite Tunisia's obligations under international maritime and human rights law.

Treatment upon interception at Sfax (3 August 2024).

The vessel was intercepted by the Tunisian National Guard. No humanitarian assistance was provided: personal belongings — documents, mobile phones, money — were confiscated, and detainees were subjected to immediate physical violence at the port of Sfax. No legal screening or asylum procedure was conducted.

Desert detention (~13 days).

S.D. and the group were **transported to a desert zone at the Libyan border**, where they were detained for approximately 13 days. Conditions included systematic daily beatings, deprivation of food and water, acts of sexual violence against women in the presence of other detainees, and a total absence of medical or sanitary provision. These conditions, taken collectively, satisfy the threshold of torture under Art. 1 CAT and Art. 5 of the African Charter.

Handover to Libyan traffickers.

At the end of the detention, Tunisian National Guard agents handed S.D. and the other victims to **Libyan trafficking networks in exchange for fuel and narcotics**. S.D. was transferred to **Al-Assah prison** in Libya, subjected to further torture, and held until his family paid a ransom of **€ 700**. He was released in September 2024. In July 2025, S.D., his wife, and their two daughters reached Lampedusa and filed applications for international protection. The family is currently residing in a reception centre near Florence.

Alleged Violations

Norm / Right	Factual Basis
Art. 4 Charter · Art. 6 ICCPR Right to Life	Five days adrift at sea without rescue; desert abandonment; foreseeable lethal risk during Libya detention — failure of positive duty to protect life.
Art. 5 Charter · CAT Arts. 1–3 Prohibition of Torture & CIDT	Systematic beatings at Sfax and during 13-day desert detention; witnessing of sexual violence; torture at Al-Assah prison.
Art. 6 Charter · Art. 9 ICCPR Arbitrary Detention	Arrest and desert detention without any legal basis, charge, or access to legal representation or a court.
Art. 12(5) Charter · Art. 13 ICCPR Collective Expulsion	Mass transfer of 46+ persons to the Libyan border with no individual assessment and no asylum access.
Art. 4 Charter · CAT Art. 3 Non-Refoulement	Deliberate handover to Libyan traffickers with full knowledge of the risk of torture and further detention — direct refoulement.
Art. 2 Charter · Art. 26 ICCPR Racial Discrimination	Enforcement exclusively targeting Sub-Saharan migrants in a context of officially endorsed racial profiling (President Saied's speech, February 2023).
Art. 16 Charter Right to Health / Art. 7 Charter Fair Hearing	No medical assistance at sea or during detention; no procedural safeguard, information on rights, or judicial oversight at any stage.

Remedies Sought

The applicant requests, pursuant to Art. 27 of the Protocol and the reparation principles of *Zongo et al. v. Burkina Faso* (2015):

- **Declarations of violation** of Arts. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12(5), 16 African Charter; CAT Arts. 2–3; ICCPR Arts. 7, 9, 13, 26. Note: Maputo Protocol and CEDAW not invoked — male applicant.
- **Compensation:** € 50,000 (moral damage); € 5,000 (legal and procedural costs). Ref.: *Alex Thomas v. Tanzania* (2015); *Konaté v. Burkina Faso* (2016).
- **Non-repetition guarantees:** legislative and administrative reforms compliant with the African Charter and international refugee law; independent monitoring of detention centres; accountability mechanisms for forces involved in push-backs and trafficking.
- **Satisfaction:** official public apology; implementation report to the Court within 6 months, with periodic compliance reporting..

Admissibility

Non-exhaustion of domestic remedies — justification. Identical structural grounds as Case 1: extreme vulnerability; direct involvement of security forces; no information on rights; material indigence; forcible expulsion.

The application was introduced within a reasonable time. No prior submission to any international body has been made.

Cross-Cutting Legal Issues and Strategic Significance

Both applications emerge from an identical structural pattern: racially-targeted interception; denial of humanitarian assistance and access to protection; systematic torture in isolated detention sites; collective expulsion without individual assessment; and active handover to Libyan trafficking networks — in Case 2 reportedly in exchange for fuel and narcotics. The convergence of independent testimonies is indicative of an institutional practice rather than isolated misconduct.

The cases present the following legal questions of general importance:

- **Refolement by active handover.** Whether deliberate transfer by State agents to known Libyan trafficking networks constitutes aggravated refolement under Art. 4 of the African Charter and Art. 3 CAT.
- **State-sponsored trafficking.** Whether the sale of migrants by uniformed State agents in exchange for material consideration engages Art. 18 of the African Charter (and Arts. 4 Maputo / 6 CEDAW in Case 1) as a freestanding prohibition.
- **Desert detention as torture.** Whether conditions of systematic physical violence, total deprivation of food and water, and exposure to life-threatening heat satisfy the Art. 1 CAT / Art. 5 Charter torture threshold.
- **Racial discrimination as autonomous violation.** Whether the officially racialised context of Tunisia's post-2022 migration enforcement renders each enforcement measure independently violative of Art. 2 of the African Charter, without requiring proof of differential intent in each case.

To the best of counsels' knowledge, these are among the **first applications before the African Court directly addressing Tunisia's responsibility for systematic violations against Sub-Saharan migrants**. The testimonies are corroborated by independent documentation from UNHCR, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and specialised research organisations. **The survivor-centred approach** — both applicants being safe in Italy and having made an informed choice to proceed — models a strategic litigation methodology consistent with international best practices in trauma-informed advocacy.

Conclusions

All the 33 witnesses who were interviewed for this report were victims of state-sponsored trafficking; they were sold as human commodities at the Libyan border in exchange for money, fuel or drugs. **Thus, the research reveals the continued operation of the system which was highlighted in the first State Trafficking report.** The testimonies collected, most of which are related to operations conducted by the GNT during 2025, show that the practices of arbitrary arrests, expulsions toward the Tunisian-Libyan border, and sales of human beings to Libyan militias and security forces are not isolated incidents, but rather they are part of a stable and long-standing operational chain. Each GNT operation involved groups of varying sizes (50–200); if we take the midpoint of this range (125) as a conservative estimate and consider the whole archive of interviews (63, related to 59 different expulsion operations), **it can be estimated that between June 2023 and December 2025, approximately 7,400 people were subjected to state-sponsored human trafficking—a conservative estimate based solely on the operations we were able to detect.**

The **Tunisian National Guard** barracks in **El Meguissem — (32°58'48"N - 11°27'20"E)** – was identified by the witnesses as the final Tunisian stop in the logistic chain linking the port of Sfax to the Al Assah detention complex (the LBG headquarters) in Libya. Around these two hubs – **El Meguissem** and **Al Assah** – several witnesses reported that they saw mass graves, corpses being loaded and unloaded, and one witness reported that they were thrown into a pit full of dead bodies. **In this report, like in the first one, there was not a single account that did not mention the death of a trafficked person**—at sea, in prisons, on buses, as a result of being beaten, due to lack of medical care or access to food and water.

A second route used for the expulsion operations linked Medenine, Tataouine, and Remada (home to a large Tunisian army base) before migrants were handed over to the Libyan authorities at the Dehiba/Wazzin border crossing between Tunisia and Libya. **Along the P19 road and the C112 road in Tunisia, witnesses reported multiple overnight stops at abandoned barracks and military hangars where various forms of violence and humiliation took place.** Thus far, spatial analysis has failed to help us locate these facilities.

Finally, two witnesses, TTN (Int. 41) e MRL (Int. 42), have allowed us to reconstruct **the case of an expulsion/sale that took place at sea in March 2025.** Two women were intercepted south of the Kerkennah Islands along with a group of around 50 people, they were loaded onto a GNT speedboat and disembarked near the Abu Kammash pier in Libya, where they were handed over to uniformed Libyan officers and taken to the Al Assah prison^[16].

The testimonies we collected describe a set of recurring degrading practices that resulted in the systematic humiliation of migrants and refugees within a relentless continuum of violence, as documented in this and in the first report. **Such conduct functions as a means of physical and psychological subjugation and it is aimed at erasing people's legal status, turning them into non-persons, bodies available for trade and exploitation.**

[16] For spatial analysis and geolocation of the testimonies, see: <https://www.statetrafficking.net/geo>

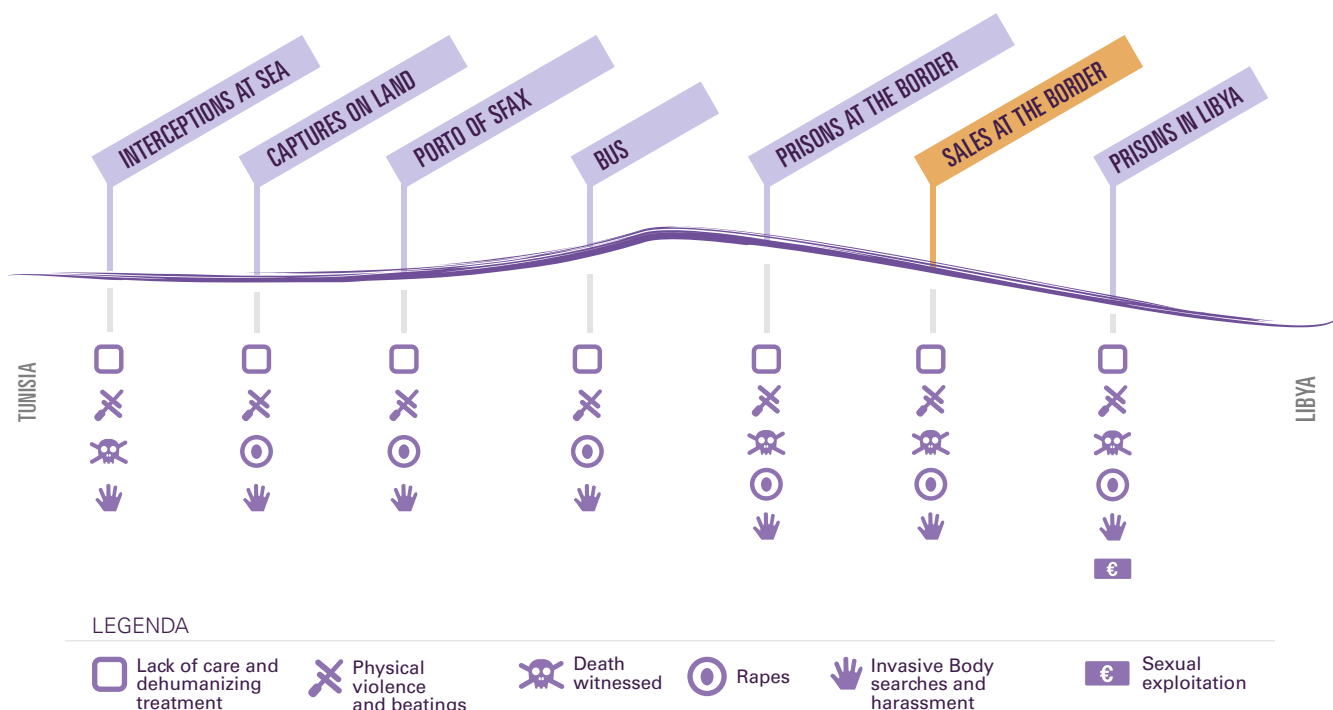
The new corpus of testimonies, which were largely provided by women and children who had survived detention in Libya, has enabled us to reconstruct the role of sexual violence within the whole state trafficking system with greater precision.

The testimonies show that sexual abuse and rape occurred routinely during arrest and expulsion operations in Tunisia, as well as during detention in Libyan prisons. These practices were not isolated incidents, but rather they represented systematic mechanisms of control which were used to subjugate bodies and extract value from them. In this sense, gender-based violence serves a structural purpose: it contributes to the subjugation of women, facilitates the commodification of trafficked women, and paves the way for their subsequent integration into a system of sexual exploitation. **In human trafficking, women’s bodies have a higher value, both in the ‘wholesale trade’ that is managed by the Tunisian state apparatus and in the ‘retail trade’ that takes place within the circuits of Libyan prisons.**

They are regarded as “high-value commodities”, which is why during exchanges women are counted separately and, as a consequence, their fates and their prison trajectories diverge from those of men, including their husbands and the fathers of their children.

The Women State Trafficking report brings to light a further link in the trafficking logistic chain in Libya, where prisons become agencies for the placement and supply of slave labor to local markets. **This is a form of debt bondage, temporary yet unpredictable in its duration, in which women are subjected to further violence and freedom deprivation in brothels or places of forced domestic labor.**

The figure below illustrates the widespread and pervasive nature of physical and sexual violence throughout the trafficking chain that the witnesses of the Women State Trafficking report have experienced and survived.



In this context, interceptions at sea and captures on Tunisian territory result in an aggregate supply of enslaved women (and men) for whom the final demand lies in Libya: in prisons through the economy of ransom and resale, in the industry of sexual and labor exploitation, or providing domestic services to local families. **This supply chain is held together by multiple intermediaries and accepted as a legitimate component of the local labor market.** It should also be noted that undocumented foreigners are already subjected to forced labor and the payment of monetary penalties in the prison system in Libya. The pervasive nature and the social legitimacy of slavery in local labor markets is even reflected in the common use of the term *abid* (slave) to refer to black migrants and refugees.

Finally, it must be emphasized that this logistic supply chain of trafficked men and women, of import/export of slaves, **is also enabled by the enormous amount of resources channeled by the European Union to implement its border externalization policies through the state apparatuses of Tunisia and Libya.** This triggers a new migration economy which no longer relies on the combination of corruption and *laissez-passer*, but rather on a flexible and potentially reversible strategy based on blocking departures.

The practices described in this report constitute extremely serious violations of human rights which are recognized under international law as crimes against humanity and include the following: **arbitrary detention, racial discrimination and incitement to racial hatred, collective pushbacks, enslavement, enforced disappearances, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, human trafficking, and gender-based violence.** All these practices fall within the broader category of state crimes, as they involve institutional apparatuses and cooperation agreements between states and with the EU. The violations and acts of violence highlighted in this report, as well as in the previous one, have been occurring in a context characterized by a lack of institutional accountability on the part of the EU, the main economic partner of Libya and Tunisia^[17]. Despite repeated warnings from civil society, these state crimes have been systematically ignored.

^[17] See the recent report Irpimedia / SosMediterranée:
<https://sosmediterranee.fr/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Report-SOS-MEDITERRANEE-IT-IrpiMedia-0326.pdf>

Recommendations

In light of the findings of nearly three years of field research conducted with 63 victims of state-sponsored trafficking between Tunisia and Libya, RR[X] urges the European Union and its member states to adopt the following measures:

I. Protection of victims and witnesses

- Proceed **with the immediate evacuation of all witnesses** who are still in Libya and Tunisia through the establishment of legal humanitarian corridors in order to ensure that their testimonies can be heard by a judicial authority in a safe country.
- Require that **the European Union delegations in Tunisia, led by Ambassador Giuseppe Perrone, and in Libya, led by Ambassador Nicola Orlando, play an active role in the evacuation process** and publicly discuss the findings of the State Trafficking and Women State Trafficking reports.
- Guarantee legal protection status within the European Union to all witnesses.
- Ensure that all witnesses receive immediate and long-term legal, medical, and psychological support, **including protection programs against potential reprisals given the seriousness of the allegations.**

II. Access, monitoring, and transparency in border areas

- **Demand full, immediate, and unrestricted access to GNT facilities at the port of Sfax and in the border areas between El Meguissem (Tunisia) and Al Assah (Libya)** for members of the EU Delegations in Tunisia and Libya, for international organizations, including UN agencies, and for civil society organizations.
- Demand that monitoring can be carried out, it must be possible to gather testimonies in safe conditions and document violations without interference from local authorities, **while the results should be made public through regular reporting.**

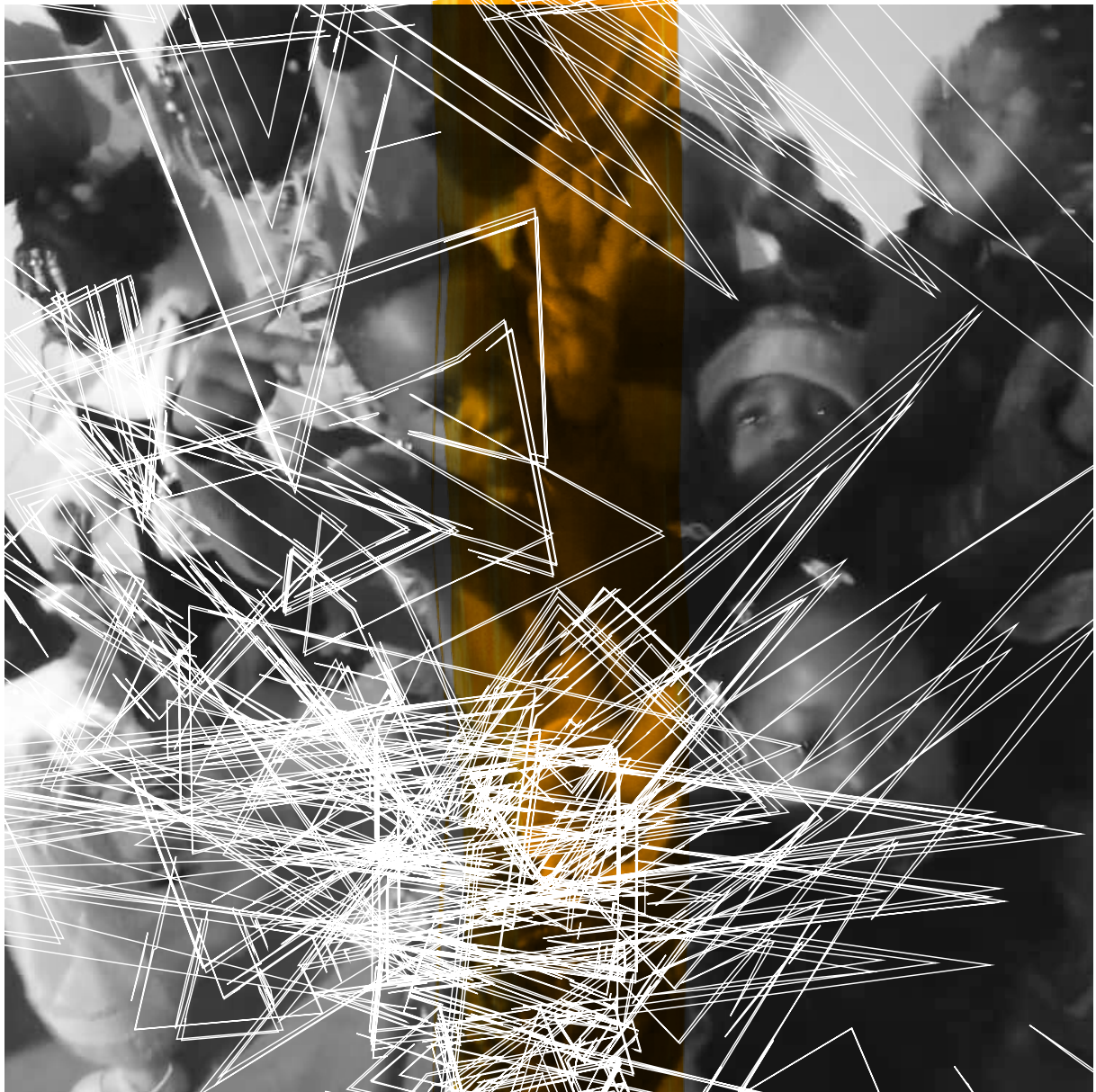
III. Independent investigations, accountability, and justice

- Support an independent international investigation involving **experts in human rights, international criminal law, and forensic inquiry, also with the aim of locating and analyzing mass graves** in the areas flagged up in the report.
- Ensure that such an investigation leads **to the clear identification of individual and institutional responsibilities, including any chains of command**, and to the initiation of effective and impartial judicial proceedings in accordance with international law.
- Ensure that these facts are also assessed in relation to **international criminal jurisdiction, considering the possibility of involving the International Criminal Court** where appropriate.
- Commit to ensuring that victims have effective access to truth, justice, and reparation in accordance with international standards.

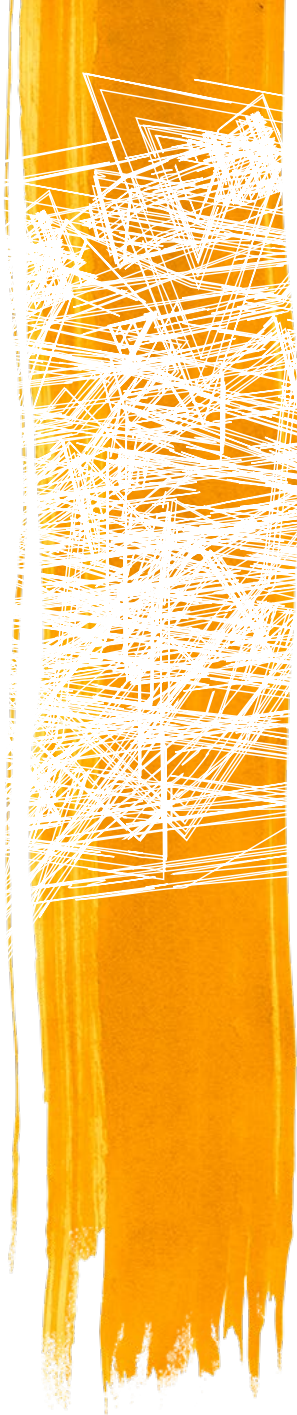
IV. Suspension of funding for border policies

- Immediately suspend **all new EU funding aimed at supporting border policies involving Tunisia and Libya and discontinue all forms of operational cooperation with the authorities involved** in the documented practices until responsibility has been established.
- Make any future resumption of funding to Tunisia and Libya conditional upon **the results of independent and verifiable investigations on whether the human rights of migrants and refugees are respected in these countries.**
- Launch **an independent and transparent audit of the use of EU funds which have already been disbursed**, ensuring full traceability and transparency to verify how they have been and are being used to support the supply chain of state-sponsored trafficking.
- **To exclude Tunisia from both the list of safe countries of origin and the list of safe third countries established by the European Commission and the Member States, and to ensure that neither Tunisia nor Libya is designated as a “place of safety”** for the disembarkation of migrants in distress in the Mediterranean.

RR[X]



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