

# **Inhuman and degrading treatment of Black Africans in Tunisia, the result of institutional racism and the externalisation of European migration policies**

The undersigned organisations express their deep concern and indignation regarding the pernicious situation in Tunisia, particularly in recent days in Sfax following the death of a Tunisian national, allegedly at the hands of sub-Saharan Africans, during a scuffle on 3 July 2023 [1]. Since then, the city has become the scene of clashes between a section of the population stirred up by hate campaigns on social media, and targeted exiles from sub-Saharan Africa living in the city. This adds to the critical racist and xenophobic events that took place in March 2023 [2], which resulted in the deaths of three people of Sub-Saharan African origin.

The hate and racist speech - a real “push for crime”- uttered by the Tunisian President in February 2023 [3] triggered these exactions and gave a blank cheque to the severe violence against exiles. This was occasioned by the local authorities’ attitude, allowing fake news to persist on social media and by the violent behaviour of some groups - police, military, and members of the population - against black exiles systematically attacked and abused with total impunity [4].

Several testimonies especially from the people most affected, the organisations of the civil society and the foreign media, estimate that serious violations of human rights are perpetrated: arbitrary and violent arrests, defenestration, stabbing... These actors denounce a genuine “migrants’ hunt” and roundups followed by the forced return of thousands of people to the borders with Algeria and Libya. The aim of the Tunisian authorities seems to be to gather these sub-Saharan exiles at the borders without any assistance and without any means of survival, including asylum seekers. Roundups precede or are combined with arbitrary evictions from their homes, destruction or theft of their property, inhuman and degrading treatment and physical violence [5]. Violations of human rights are being committed by public authorities and/or private militia widely documented, but the perpetrators are not yet convicted neither by the courts nor by the state authorities.

All this is happening within the context of an unprecedented crisis in Tunisia affecting all levels: economic, social, political, institutional, financial, etc. A crisis deepened by pressure and haggling from the European Union (EU), which intends to impose on Tunisia the externalisation of border controls and migration management through a “strengthened” but unequal partnership on migration [6]. This repressive policy involves the expulsion from European countries of all exiles with no right to residency who have transited through Tunisia, which is designated as a “safe country”, unlike Libya. The reason for this is to make Tunisia the EU’s border guard, responsible for containing “undesirable” migration and keeping it as far away from European territory as possible, in exchange for substantial

and timely financial aid (at least € 900,000). And all this despite the concerns raised by the authoritarian drift in Tunisia [7] and the disregard for the rule of law and the fundamental rights of exiles in Tunisia.

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

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

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

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

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

[2] “Tunisia, racist violence targets black migrants and refugees”, 10th March 2023, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/10/tunisia-racist-violence-targets-black-migrants-refugees>

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

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

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

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

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