HOW WATCH THE MED WORKS

Informing WTM supports the distribution of information about rights & security at sea for migrants & seamen

Reporting WTM collects reports sent via phone calls or the internet from migrants, relatives, seafarers and other witnesses of ongoing or past violations of migrants rights at sea

Monitoring WTM combines testimonies and other forms of evidence with technology such as georeferenced mapping and satellite imagery to reconstruct violations on its online platform.

Pressuring Reports of ongoing violations or distress at sea posted on WTM may be used by migrants' rights organisations to pressure authorities into respecting their obligations and save the lives of migrants at sea

Filing Legal cases WTM generates information and evidence on past violations to determine responsibility for them and support legal cases so as to end the impunity at sea

Supporting WTM WTM welcomes support in the form of research, contacts, translation, reports or giving echo the violations of migrant rights at sea
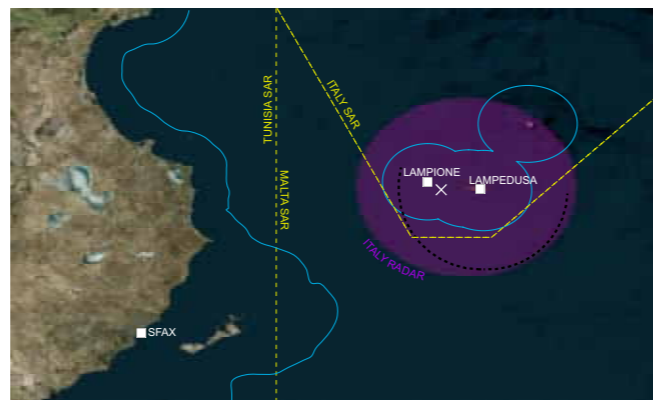
CONTACT

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WTM network

Example 2
»Lampione Case« in September 2012

(X) indicates the approximate location where the wreck occurred. The boat was located with the Italian territorial water (━) and Search and Rescue zone (━), in an area patrolled daily by the Guardia di Finanza (••••) and covered by coastal radars (●).

On the morning of 6 September 2012, around 130 people left from the beach of Sidi Mansour in Sfax aboard a 10 meter-long wooden boat directed towards Southern Italy. A patrol ship of the Tunisian Maritime Guard crossed the path of the migrants' boat in Tunisian waters and followed it for a short time. The Maritime Guard warned the migrants that the ship was overloaded and about to encounter an upcoming thunderstorm, but they let them continue, alerting their Italian counterparts.

As of 06.00 PM (Italian time) of the same day, the migrants sent several SOS by mobile phone, alerting the Italian Coast Guards that their boat was taking in water near Lampione, a tiny island just 17 KM West of Lampedusa. As the water rose, the migrants started jumping into the sea, attempting to swim to the small deserted island. According to the press reports, rescue operations started immediately after the migrants' call for help was received but it was not until 02.00 AM of the following day that a German NATO ship which had offered help in the rescue operations found the first two persons at sea. Most of the 56 survivors were able to swim to Lampione

but were only located and rescued shortly before 04.00 AM. Nine bodies were recovered from the water during the next days and weeks. The survivors estimated that over 70 fellow travellers died, including women and at least one child.

Until today, it has been impossible to understand why it took almost 10 hours to locate the shipwrecked despite the notification by the Tunisian Maritime Guard to their Italian counterparts and the SOS calls sent by the migrants themselves. Why could these deaths not be averted?

Against this background and in view of an excruciating lack of transparency from the Italian and Tunisian authorities, fierce protest broke out a few days afterwards in some of the Tunisian cities from which those who died came.

WatchTheMed contributed to the ongoing enquiry into this tragic event by translating the few available elements of information on the case into spatial and temporal coordinates. In this way, it was possible to analyse the successive layers of surveillance present in the area and demonstrate that the boat was left to sink in an area located within the operational zones of Frontex and Guardia di Finanza and covered not only by mobile phone network but also by Italian radars. Maps produced by WatchTheMed were used for press-work in Tunisia and Italy and might later serve as evidence if a legal case is filed.

↗ www.ftdes.net/node/1929

Looking to the future A Vision of intervention

Apart from reconstructing past events and determining responsibility for migrants' deaths, WatchThe Med has further potential. It would be technically conceivable to map real-time events and spread information about people in distress at sea to immediately pressure actors at sea to rescue them. In order for this to materialise, a well-functioning SOS system and a responsive civilian network across the Mediterranean are necessary preconditions.

watch
THE MED

www.watchthemed.net

TRANSNATIONAL MONITORING AGAINST THE DEADLY INJUSTICE AT SEA!

"SEVEN DAYS AGO MANY OF OUR RELATIVES LEFT FOR LAMPEDUSA. THE BOAT SANK. THE RESCUE TEAM CAME FAR TOO LATE, EVEN THOUGH THEY SENT AN SOS. WE DO NOT KNOW, WHO HAS DROWNED AND WHO HAS SURVIVED. THE SURVIVORS ARE NOW IN THE DEPORTATION PRISON IN LAMPEDUSA. BUT WE DO NOT RECEIVE THEIR NAMES. WE WENT INTO THE STREETS AND THE GOVERNMENT SENT THE POLICE AND ALLOWS THEM TO BEAT US, TO THROW TEAR GAS GRENADES AT US. ARE WE ANIMALS? ARE WE DOGS, THAT ARE CONSTANTLY KICKED ABOUT?"

12 September 2012 interview by Tunisian Radio Shems FM with protesting people in the city of El-Fahs

Watch The Med (Watch the Mediterranean Sea): an online mapping platform to monitor the deaths and violations of migrants' rights at the maritime borders of the EU. WatchTheMed was initiated as part of the 2012 Boats4People campaign in the Central Mediterranean. Today the project further involves a wide network of organisations, activists and researchers.

Since the beginning of the 90s, thousands of people have tried to reach Europe clandestinely by boat, thereby contesting the laws, policies and practices that attempt to limit the movement of the majority of Non-Europeans and transform them into "illegals" if they manage to reach Europe. However this act of freedom has come at a heavy human cost. For on the one hand, the militarisation of the EU's maritime boundaries has forced migrants to resort to dangerous means of crossing, on the other the criminalisation of assistance to them by seafarers and the reluctance of coastal states to disembark them has led to repeated failures in the obligation to rescue migrants in distress. Time and again they are 'left to die'. As a result, over 13.000 cases of deaths at the maritime boundaries of the EU have been reported since the beginning of the 90s. Deaths and migrants' rights violations are thus the structural product of the current border regime. **How many more lives will be swallowed by the currents before this deadly policy is put to an end?**
Thus far, the EU as well as the states that serve as its watchdogs could avoid assuming responsibility for these deaths – it is difficult to prove who failed to act in an emergency in the open sea or who denied the right to demand asylum to migrants' by pushing their boat back, for these violations happen far away from the gaze of activists and the public. Through the WatchTheMed online mapping platform, we seek to develop a powerful tool to **monitor those who control migration and bring an end the impunity at sea.**
Through the transnational cooperation with migrants' rights organisations, activists, researchers, migrants, and seafarers active in, around and beyond the Mediterranean and the use of new mapping technologies, WatchTheMed aims to document the deaths and violations that are the structural product of the exclusionary border regime implemented at sea. The online map allows to spatialise incidents across the complex legal and political geography of the Mediterranean Sea. Through the accounts of survivors and witnesses, but also the analysis of ocean currents, winds, mobile phone data and satellite imagery, it is possible to determine in which Search and Rescue zone, jurisdictions and operational areas an incident occurred – as well as showing other boats who were in the vicinity of those in distress. Spatializing such information is essential to determine responsibility for violations at sea. Apart from reconstructing past events, the participatory nature of the platform allows many different actors to to indicate ongoing situations of distress.

The documentation generated by WatchTheMed seeks to support the work of organisations that defend migrants' rights to inform migrants on the risks of migration on their rights and security at sea, pressure authorities into respecting their obligations at sea, support the ongoing campaigns by the relatives of the dead and disappeared at sea, and support legal proceedings against those who violated the rights of migrants.

"I AM BECOMING MORE CONVINCED THAT EUROPEAN POLICIES ON IMMIGRATION CONSIDER THIS OFFERING OF HUMAN LIVES AS A WAY TO RESTRICT THE FLOWS OF PEOPLE, OR EVEN AS A DETERRENT. BUT, IF FOR THESE PEOPLE A TRIP ON A BOAT IS STILL THE ONLY POSSIBILITY OF HOPE, I BELIEVE THAT THEIR DEATH AT SEA MUST BE A REASON FOR EUROPE TO FEEL ASHAMED AND DISHONOURED."

Open letter by Giusi Nicolini, Mayor of Lampedusa, December 2012

PAST DOCUMENTED CASES

Example 1 »Left-to-Die-Boat« in March 2011
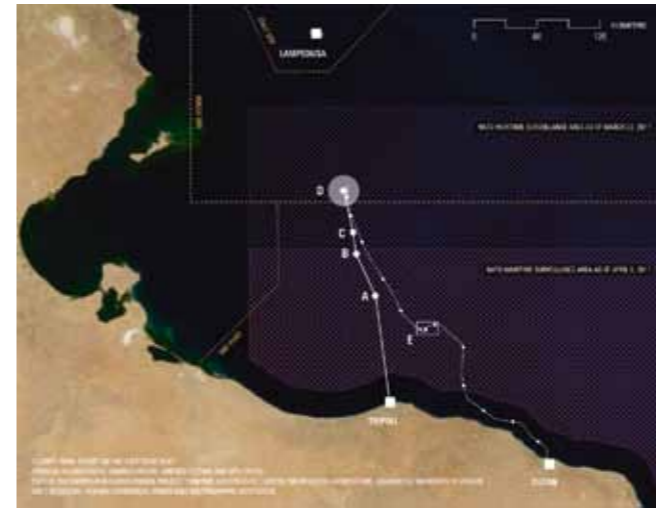
(A) migrants' boat first spotted by a French aircraft; **(B)** & **(C)** distress calls & military helicopter visits; **(D)** boat runs out of fuel & starts to drift; **(E)** encounter with a military ship. The boat briefly entered the Maltese Search & Rescue zone (····) but always remained with NATO's maritime surveillance area (////).

In 2011, in the context of the military intervention in Libya, more than 40 military ships and aircrafts were deployed in the Central Mediterranean. These waters were arguably the most surveilled waters on earth at the time. Despite this presence, over 2000 people died at sea. One particular event provoked widespread public outrage. On the 27 of March 2011, 72 Sub-Saharan migrants left Tripoli on-board a small rubber dinghy in the attempt to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa. After having covered approximately half of the distance, they ran out of fuel and started drifting in the open sea. Despite reporting their position via satellite phone to the Italian Coast Guard (which later informed their Maltese colleagues and NATO) and despite having been approached by at least a patrol aircraft, a military helicopter, two fishermen's boats and a large military vessel, nobody intervened to rescue them. After 14 days of drift during which, with no water or food on board, 63 people died, 9 survivors landed back on the Libyan coast.

A coalition of NGOs was formed to investigate further this incident and demand accountability for these deaths. To support their effort, a group of researchers from the University of London, who later initiated the WatchTheMed project, combined the testimonies of the survivors and official documents with maps, a drift model and satellite imagery to reconstruct with precision the events and locate the military vessels which were nearby. While many questions remain open, these new tools allowed to corroborate the testimonies of the survivors and indicated a strong degree of responsibility by the Italian and Maltese Coast Guards as well as military actors, who, although informed of the migrants' distress and location, did not assist them. Legal procedures have already been filed in France and Italy and will follow in other countries. These are some of the first legal cases for non-assistance to migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.

↗ www.fidh.org/63-migrants-morts-en-Mediterranee
↗ www.forensic-architecture.org/investigations/forensic-oceanography

Looking to the past Boats4People 2012

Against the background of the death of more than 2,000 people at sea in 2011, the transnational network Boats4People launched its first action across the Mediterranean in July 2012. Moving in-between Sicily, Tunisia and Lampedusa onboard a solidarity sailboat and ferryboats, B4P organised a series of protest actions, press conferences, meetings and memorial events in several port cities. This protest tour was aimed at raising awareness on the plight of migrants at sea and further developing solidarity networks. During this action, WatchTheMed's pilot phase was launched and an initial version of the interactive map was tested online. **www.boats4people.org**