

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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31 ORGANISATIONS CALL ON THE EU TO URGENTLY END ABUSIVE MIGRATION COOPERATION WITH LIBYAN AUTHORITIES

31 civil society organisations call on EU institutions and member states to urgently end their shameful cooperation with Libyan authorities on migration control. Plans to strengthen cooperation with rival authorities in eastern and western Libya, against the backdrop of long-standing widespread and systematic human rights abuses by both sets of actors against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with impunity, and in light of repeated attacks by Libyan forces against Search and Rescue (SAR) NGOs in the Mediterranean Sea, are alarming.

ESCALATING, WIDESPREAD AND SYSTEMATIC VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES AGAINST REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Civil society groups have consistently [expressed](#) deep concern regarding EU and member states' cooperation with the Libyan authorities, notably support to the western-based Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and the General Administration for Coastal Security (GACS) under the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU), in conducting interceptions at sea and disembarking refugees and migrants back in Libya. These [concerns](#) relate to [various forms of assistance](#), including financial support, the provision of technical equipment and capacity-building, as well as the sharing of [intelligence](#), for example through [Frontex's Multipurpose Aerial Surveillance](#). EU support has enabled patterns of violations and abuse and [rendered](#) the EU [complicit](#) in such violations.

This assistance from the EU has facilitated the interception and forced return of tens of thousands of refugees and migrants annually to Libya, where they have been subjected to [widespread and systematic human rights violations](#) and abuses, including [indefinite arbitrary detention](#) in cruel and inhuman conditions, unlawful killings, torture and other ill-treatment, sexual violence, extortion and forced labour. These patterns have been repeatedly denounced by [multiple human rights organizations](#) and documented by UN bodies, including most recently the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in their [February 2026 report](#). In 2023 the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission had [called](#) on third countries to cease support to Libyan actors, including to the LCG, involved in what likely amounted to [crimes against humanity](#) against refugees and migrants.

Over the month of June 2026 human rights organizations including [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Libya Crimes Watch](#) have documented a renewed crackdown against refugees and migrants involving thousands of people being subjected to mass arrests, arbitrary detentions, and unlawful collective expulsions from rival Libyan authorities and allied armed groups and militias. Officials in east and west – including the GNU and its rival eastern-based “Libyan Government” and House of Representatives, allied to the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) armed group, in de facto control of large swathes of eastern and southern Libya -- have fuelled xenophobic and racist discourses amid a surge of anti-migrant protests and vigilantism against the “permanent settlement” of predominantly Black and racialized migrants. Crackdowns against refugees and migrants have been documented in previous years. For instance, in March 2025, western based authorities and militias [carried out](#) mass arrests of refugees and migrants then suspended the operations of humanitarian organisations supporting them.

ONGOING IMPUNITY FOR VIOLENCE AT SEA AND ATTACKS ON PEOPLE IN DISTRESS AND SEARCH AND RESCUE VESSELS AT THE HANDS OF THE LCG

In addition to Libya not being a safe country for disembarkation, the LCG does not [comply](#) with SAR obligations and standards. It has [repeatedly](#) engaged in [violent and dangerous](#) attacks on people in distress at sea, leading to deaths during interceptions. It has also shot at NGO sea rescue ships carrying refugees and migrants, and engaged in other violent practices, including piercing and hijacking unseaworthy boats, leading them to capsize, and also committing physical violence against the people onboard.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have notably expressed concern regarding recent incidents involving violent acts by the LCG against SAR NGO vessels and their crew, including two shootings against the NGOs SOS

Méditerranée and Sea-Watch that occurred in August and September 2025 while rescued people were on board, with at least one incident involving a P664 Corrubia-class [boat donated by Italy](#) to the LCG with EU funding. Both organizations [reported](#) that live ammunition was fired at their ship's hull. In the [case](#) of SOS Mediterranée, the shooting lasted for “at least 20 relentless minutes”. Despite the EU [communicating](#) that the Libyan authorities had [opened an investigation](#) into the first shooting, the Libyan authorities have not publicly confirmed this nor have they contacted the NGOs concerned. In a response to a communication sent by Amnesty International on 6 March 2026, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja Kallas confirmed on 14 July 2026 that the EU has continued to raise these incidents with Libyan authorities “on different occasions, with different interlocutors and at different levels”. The response however failed to provide an update on the investigation.¹

Against the backdrop of the pervasive impunity surrounding these incidents, on 11 May 2026, the LCG fired ammunition at the Sea-Watch 5 rescue ship in international waters north of Tripoli, seriously endangering the lives of people onboard. According to [Sea-Watch](#), the LCG “ordered [their ship] to sail to Libya”, threatened to board it and then pursued it for several hours. While Sea-Watch reported the presence of a Frontex airplane on scene right before the shooting, the organization shared that it only responded to their emergency call three hours later. At least two out of the three vessels used by the LCG in this incident – the PB648 Bigliani-class “Ras Jadir” and the PB662 Corrubia-class “Murzuq” – corresponded to vessels donated by Italy with EU funding in 2017 and 2023 respectively.

Upon the Sea-Watch 5's arrival in Italy, authorities opened a criminal investigation against its captain for “aiding and abetting unauthorized immigration”, adding to the long-standing [harassment and criminalization](#) of humanitarian activities by Italian authorities that hinder the life-saving work of NGOs, in the absence of state-led SAR efforts.

PLANS FOR HEIGHTENED COOPERATION WITH LIBYAN ACTORS RISKS DEEPENING EU COMPLICITY

Despite these serious abuses, according to media reports, official statements and leaked official documents, the EU is enhancing its engagement with Libyan actors, following the [visit by Commissioner Brunner along with Italian, Greek and Maltese government officials](#) to the country in July 2025. A “technical [mission](#)” to Tripoli on migration control took place on 3 February 2026 during which European authorities handed over new search-and-rescue vessels to the [LCG and GACS](#).

A document leaked to NGO Statewatch dated 20 May 2026 details a “[technical arrangement](#)” between the EU's naval mission Operation Irini and “Libyan institutions responsible for law enforcement and search and rescue at sea,” including the Libyan Navy and LCG, which would notably entail the provision of material assistance and the operational enabling of maritime coordination structures, alongside training, to increase Libyan search-and-rescue capacity.

Alarmingly, leaked [documents](#) and [media reports](#) first suggested the Commission's intention to cooperate on migration control with the LAAF armed group based in eastern Libya. As confirmed by the EU in a social media [statement](#), plans include the establishment of a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Benghazi and a surveillance tower with radar in Tobruk, both cities in eastern Libya under LAAF's control. The plans appear to draw on the model previously [implemented](#) by the EU Commission to assist the western-based government with the establishment of an MRCC in Tripoli in 2017. In recent months, [several meetings](#) have taken place with the LAAF, as well as a “[technical mission](#)” in Benghazi.

In its 14 July response to Amnesty International, the EU additionally confirmed that it was supporting the establishment of an MRCC in Benghazi “to respond to Libyan requests addressing acute maritime security challenges in the east, and to promote intra-Libyan cooperation, as well as cooperation with international search and rescue actors in the Mediterranean Sea.” It disclosed that funding had already been secured from the European Peace Facility (EPF) exclusively via voluntary financial contributions from several member states.

The LAAF is responsible, along with affiliated armed groups, for [crimes under international law](#), as well as gross and widespread human rights abuses. These include [arbitrary and indefinite detention](#) and forced labour following interceptions of refugees and migrants at sea, collective and summary expulsions of tens of thousands of refugees and migrants, along with arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, unlawful killings, forced displacement and [enforced disappearances of Libyan nationals](#).

¹ On 10 April 2026, the European Ombudsman opened an [inquiry](#) into the European Commission's failure to provide documents within the applicable time limit, notably in relation to the August 2025 shooting. As of this publication, the inquiry appears to have been settled, without further details being made public.

Civil society groups are profoundly concerned that ongoing EU cooperation with Libyan authorities on migration control, despite serious abuses continue with impunity, fly in the face of the EU's international obligations to respect and protect human rights. We call on the European Commission and EU States to review their approach and urgently change course to avoid further complicity human rights violations in Libya and instead take the following actions:

- Urgently suspend any cooperation with Libya on migration and border control, and in particular any assistance facilitating the containment of people in Libya, including financial and technical support, capacity-building, and intelligence-sharing, in light of their involvement in widespread and systematic violations of the rights of refugees and migrants, as well as their involvement in violent incidents against NGO rescue ships.
- Halt plans to continue or deepen cooperation with the LAAF in eastern Libya, including the funding of an MRCC, given the serious risk of human rights violations and abuse.
- Require that any future cooperation on migration and border control with Libya commit all parties to ensure that anyone rescued or intercepted at sea is disembarked in a place of safety, which cannot be Libya, including by: defining operating procedures for SAR operations within the Libyan SRR region, fully aligned with international law and standards; ensuring that shipmasters rescuing people are promptly assisted in the identification of a place of safety for disembarkation, which cannot be Libya; and ensuring that civilian vessels, including boats operated by NGOs, are fully able to carry out their lifesaving SAR activities, without hindrance and criminalization, including in Libya's SRR region.
- Ensure that external funding on migration, including to Libya, places human rights at the centre, focuses on measures to protect the rights and safety of refugees and migrants, and involves robust due diligence measures. This should include: prior human rights impact assessments, based on robust benchmarks; independent, third-party human rights monitoring mechanisms; clear suspensive clauses in any agreement or disbursement of funds, to suspend activities found to be negatively impacting human rights; transparent financing with safeguards to ensure that no EU funding and provisions of assets contribute to human rights violations, including guarantees that they will not be disbursed to authorities and entities involved in human rights violations and abuses.
- Put pressure on Libyan authorities to carry out thorough and independent investigations into the three shooting incidents against NGO ships to hold perpetrators accountable, provide effective remedy to victims and make the findings of the investigation public. Ensure accountability for any human rights violations that the EU and member states may have been responsible for through their cooperation with the LCG. This should be pursued by the European Commission through an independent, external and public assessment to determine EU responsibility into the shootings and through prompt, thorough and independent investigations by member states' authorities.
- We further call on the **European Parliament** to initiate a Commission of Inquiry into the responsibility of the EU and member states into the three NGO rescue boat shootings.

SIGNATORIES

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| • Abolish Frontex Italia | • Libya Crimes Watch |
| • Adala for All (AFA) | • Migration-Control.Info |
| • Alliance with Refugees in Libya | • MV Louise Michel Project |
| • Amnesty International | • Pilotes volontaires |
| • Associazione Studi Giuridici Immigrazione (ASGI) | • Quaker Council for European Affairs |
| • Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI) | • Refugees in Libya |
| • Captain Support Network | • RESQSHIP e.V. |
| • Caritas Europa | • R42 - Sail and Rescue |
| • Convenzione dei diritti nel Mediterraneo | • Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario SMH |
| • EuroMed Rights | • Sea-Eye e.V. |
| • European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) | • Sea Punks e.V. |
| • European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) | • Sea-Watch |
| • European Network Against Racism (ENAR) | • SOS Humanity e.V. |
| • GRUPPO Melitea | • SOS Mediterranee |
| • Human Rights Watch | • United4Rescue – Gemeinsam Retten e.V. |
| | • Watch the Med AlarmPhone |