



MONITORING  
THE RIGHT TO LIFE  
JANUARY-JUNE 2022

SLAUGHTER AT THE  
NADOR-MELILLA BORDER  
24 JUNE 2022

## **Slaughter at the Nador-Melilla border 24 June 2022**

### **A death trap: two months of ongoing repression**

Since May this year, the camps in the woods around Melilla have become a war zone. Military incursions using increasingly aggressive strategies and military equipment have taken place two or three times a week, resulting in significant harm to people and property.

The security forces attack migrants' camps in the early hours of the morning. First, groups of soldiers surround the ghettos<sup>1</sup> as the migrants sleep, taking them by surprise. Then helicopters arrive and begin to spray gas, which, according to statements from migrants, is intended to choke them as they flee from the auxiliary forces.

These operations last for hours and end with the camps being razed to the ground. In each raid, the refugees lose the few material belongings that they still possess. They also report a deterioration in their physical and mental health as a result of these practices.

The victims/survivors interviewed by our organisation described the impact of the raids on their lives:

*We lost everything, including our clothes and shoes, and it happened over and over again. After two months of that, we had nothing left to lose because they'd robbed us of our health too. But we never lost hope that we'd escape the situation because going back isn't an option for us.*

*We were beaten again and again; we had wounds that we couldn't heal. It was very difficult to find medical care. The most serious thing are the fractures because they beat you so that you can't walk or run away. If you can't move, you're good for nothing because often our only way to defend ourselves is to run away.*

*They stole everything they didn't burn: our phones so that we couldn't call for help, the few dirhams we had in our pockets. The soldiers took everything, and if there was anything left, the thugs accompanying them during the raids took it instead.*

*It can drive you mad not sleeping, always being on the alert, waiting for them to attack you, being ready to run for your life all the time. Many of us have experienced war and we know what these military incursions mean, how they work and how they destroy you little by little.*

---

[1] This term is used to refer to informal camps with flimsy shelters made from wood and plastic

The raids prompted the migrants to move their camps towards Melilla into more impenetrable parts of the mountain. Drones played an important role in locating people who were hiding or retreating in search of safer locations. These unmanned robots are increasingly common in migration control, where they are employed to identify targets and provide images used to plan military incursions.

According to the migrants, the situation became increasingly unbearable from late May to early June.

On 7 June, there was a major raid with more helicopters and gas than usual. During the raid, four Sudanese refugees were badly injured: in the words of fellow migrants, **“they broke their bodies”**.

The fact that the migrants outnumber the soldiers is their only form of defence, ensuring that they are not all injured and/or detained at once. On the Monday of the week when the slaughter at the Nador-Melilla border occurred, around 500 soldiers surrounded the refugees’ camp. Once again, they were attacked with gas and dozens of migrants were wounded.

On Tuesday, the attacks let up but they intensified again on Wednesday and Thursday. From the early hours of the morning to the evening, the soldiers chased the refugees from the camp. During the raid on 23 June, fire broke out in the woods, endangering people and the environment.

That day, a clear message was sent: the migrants had 24 hours to vacate the area or the next raid would be even more violent.

On Friday 24 June, with the prospect of another attack looming, individual strengths waning and hopes of escaping the violence, the migrants in the camp decided to flee forward towards the border fence. The raid had begun early in the morning.

This time, the migrants had neither hooks nor ladders to climb the fence; it was every man for himself. They managed to get hold of a power saw and shears for cutting metal and decided to break through one of the gates in the fence, making sure nobody would be left behind at risk of further attack by the soldiers. The migrants were aware that many were reaching the limit of their physical strength and would not be able to climb the six-metre fence.



## Pain, blood and death

A group of around 1,800 people walked to the border fence in the Beni Enzar area bordering Melilla. Some were carrying items that they had found to defend themselves from the attacks they had suffered in the camps on previous days.

The soldiers charged again and were pursuing them.

*“Not everyone was carrying sticks. Some, like me, had only our legs to run on. But I can understand how after this time they felt like a stick might save their lives. I think we were conscious of the fact that they would kill us. Throughout that week, we felt that they would cross that line and that we were no longer safe anywhere. It was do or die, there was no other way out”.*

The migrants in the group came from Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Mali, Yemen, Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, Niger, Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso and Liberia. More than 80% of the people trying to reach the Nador-Melilla border fence were from Sudan and South Sudan.

From 08:00 to 14:00 on 24 June, there were clashes between migrants and soldiers. In the first few hours, these clashes were limited to hand-to-hand combat. Later, the migrants' sticks, stones, desperation and fear were countered by the soldiers' drones, surveillance cameras, anti-riot gear, tear gas and firearms.

The first group to reach the border fence used the power saw to try and cut the wires, but witnesses explained that they quickly ran out of battery and were unable to do much more with the shears. Some people were able to reach the other side of the fence.

By that point, the soldiers had circled the migrants from behind and those who had not succeeded in reaching the other side were surrounded. They were trapped; people fell to the ground one after another but received no assistance.

No coordinated support from Spain or Morocco was provided for the people at the fence who were suffering the impact of the crush caused by the soldiers' manoeuvres.

On the contrary, witnesses report that the Moroccan forces trampled the bodies of those who had fallen to the ground.

Those who were no longer able to move were dragged away and dumped in the sun, with no attempt made to evaluate the extent of their wounds. If they moved, they were beaten until they stayed still.

*“I’ve been to the border several times but they’d never been so violent before. The more recent times were very difficult. It was a disaster. It was as if they had everything prepared beforehand. They forced us to move forward and when we did, they came in from behind. We were surrounded”.*

*“If you cried, they beat you again until they broke your legs or you passed out”.*

The coordinated violence employed that day led to deaths and hundreds of injuries. Based on witness statements, a series of different causes of death and injury were identified. In some cases, several of these causes came together at once.

- Suffocated by gas.
- Crushed after falling to the ground.
- Crushed by the soldiers’ boots.
- Beaten with traditional and electric batons.
- Struck by bullets.
- Refused medical care and assistance.
- Forced displacement of wounded people.
- Removals of wounded people from Melilla without receiving medical treatment.

The circle surrounding the refugees was made deadlier still by the entry of Moroccan soldiers into Melillan territory. Working alongside the Spanish security forces, they were able to continue attacking the migrants and push them back to Morocco. These practices were used by both the Spanish and Moroccan security forces, which coordinated with one another.

According to oral and visual evidence provided by the victims/survivors, the Spanish State drove back dozens of potential refugees and unaccompanied minors to Morocco on 24 June. These removals took place despite the scenes witnessed by the Spanish authorities, which revealed the torture and inhuman and degrading treatment suffered by the refugees first-hand.

The Spanish authorities saw what was happening and used the information to support the repressive military strategies used by Morocco. However, neither of the two countries initiated a collaborative effort to help the victims and mitigate the terrible impact of the tragedy.

Monitoring instruments such as drones and cameras were used solely for military manoeuvres and not to obtain information to assess the scale of the emergency and mobilise coordinated assistance.

As a result, dead, wounded and exhausted people stricken with pain and fear laid on the ground for up to eight hours under the blazing sun, with soldiers arbitrarily beating them from time to time.

The area around the border was packed with suffering, inert bodies until buses and a few ambulances began to arrive.

The luckier migrants received medical treatment for their wounds, although what went on inside the hospitals remains a mystery as the Moroccan police prevented social organisations and victims' family members from entering. The Ministry of Interior tightened security at the hospitals in the cities of Nador and Oujda.

Many questions remain unanswered. What medical criteria were used to decide to move some wounded people and not others? What assistance did they receive and when? Have they received support for operations and medical treatment? Were they able to contact their loved ones? Why and how did some migrants die in hospital? Did they speak to their families before they died?

Meanwhile, 65 people have been charged with offences relating to the events of 23 and 24 June.

The accused have been divided into two groups. One group has been charged with serious crimes by the Court of Appeal in Nador and is facing sentences of up to 20 years in prison. The other group is charged with facilitating clandestine entry and exit of people to Morocco, among other accusations. All the refugees are in custody and are being assisted by lawyers from social organisations.

The remaining migrants have been subjected to forced relocations within the country, stripped of all their belongings and abandoned to their fate. Our organisation also documented the deportation of 132 people to an area known as no-man's land on the border with Algeria.

The number of casualties remains unknown. Witness statements collected by our organisation place the number of dead at 62. We have been able to confirm the deaths of 37 people on the day of the slaughter itself and an additional three deaths that occurred at a later date due to injuries inflicted on 24 June. This brings the number of casualties confirmed by our organisation to 40. May they rest in peace.

Once again, a lack of transparency prevented organisations and families from visiting the dead in order to identify them. It is unclear whether autopsies have been conducted to clarify the cause of death. Therefore, as well as the right to life, the rights of deceased people and their families have also been violated: the right to be identified, to be informed of the true causes of death and to have a dignified burial.

The rights of the victims/survivors of the slaughter and their family members were not only violated on 24 June; they have been constantly revictimised since then.

## **The humanitarian crisis following the slaughter**

Our collective organised a team of human rights activists to provide assistance to the wounded and to those subjected to forced relocation following the slaughter on 24 June.

In four humanitarian missions that have supported 862 people in different cities at the time of writing, the following tasks were carried out:

- Providing medical care to wounded people.
- Issuing kits containing food, hygiene products, clothing and shoes.
- Drawing up a list of missing people who are being looked for by relatives and friends from their communities with help from victims/survivors.
- Obtaining witness statements to produce an account focusing on the rights of the victims/survivors.

During these last few weeks of work on the ground, we have witnessed a genuine humanitarian crisis, which the Moroccan authorities have sought to conceal with political support from the Spanish government. We have attempted to alleviate the terrible pain caused by the slaughter by working with community leaders. We have also been able to work towards a collective evaluation of the impact of the policy of border militarisation on refugees.

## Key characteristics of the humanitarian crisis:

- **80% of the people assisted suffered injuries of varying sizes and severities on 24 June.** Most of the injuries were caused by violence and beatings: fractured legs, arms and skulls were observed among the migrants.

*“They beat us even when we were lying on the ground. We had no strength, we were completely exhausted.”*

We assisted people who were waiting for operations at hospitals in the places to which they had been forced to relocate despite the severity of their condition.

We witnessed a bullet wound that had to be operated on to remove the projectile.

Another young man, after being forcefully relocated by bus, had to be admitted to hospital because he had fallen into a coma while being detained. He remained in a coma for three days and had difficulties moving and speaking when he awoke due to the blows he had received to his head.

The wounded needed operations and some of these operations required materials that are not provided for free by the health authorities. The fact that the police did not allow social organisations or family members to enter the hospitals in the days following the tragedy exacerbated the humanitarian emergency. For example, an operation that was delayed due to a lack of materials caused a person who had suffered fractures at the hands of the soldiers to have one of their feet amputated.

- **Physical and mental conditions associated with post-traumatic stress.** Panic attacks, nightmares, pain all over the body and fear were reported by most of the individuals assisted during the humanitarian missions.
- **Left with nothing.** After the violence, the refugees we met had lost everything. According to their witness statements, the soldiers had stolen the little that they had left: mobile phones, small amounts of money and even shoes to prevent them from walking. The terrible situation in which the migrants found themselves in the days following the slaughter was exacerbated by the difficulties experienced by social organisations and community leaders in providing humanitarian assistance.



- **Persecution of the Sudanese refugee community.** According to the statements gathered and observations on the ground, police controls in the days following 24 June were specifically aimed at identifying people of Sudanese origin. In subsequent weeks, the Sudanese refugee community was subjected to particular harsh repression. This stigmatisation has filtered into society more broadly and we were able to confirm the death of a Sudanese man during a fight with a Moroccan citizen.
- **Child migrants.** 30% of the victims/survivors of the slaughter were young people aged between 15 and 17 years old. 5% were children aged between 11 and 14.

## The narrative

### Constructing a legitimising narrative: a pornography of violence.

The authorities' discourse in relation to the slaughter emphasised externalisation and Morocco's role as the European Union's gendarme. The stances taken by the Spanish State and its Moroccan neighbour have been based on the same three discursive pillars: the fight against people smugglers, Algeria's responsibility for organising the attempted fence crossing, and Spanish and EU support for the military equipment used during the slaughter.

The scenario created by the two countries, including images showing the violence used, seeks to confirm the need for these types of interventions against migrants.

There has been a shift from a pornography of pain to a pornography of violence, with violence presented as collateral damage caused by necessary border control measures.

In this scenario, civilian victims of the border war are shown.

It is paradoxical that journalists from EU countries have been able to carry out their work relatively 'freely' in Morocco, even without official permission from the Moroccan authorities, while social organisations with licensed projects authorised to support migrants have faced serious difficulties in assisting the victims/survivors of the tragedy.

In the official narrative, the refugees caught up in the slaughter are nothing more than an anonymous mass of people. This represents an increasingly violent strategy of exposing migrants' 'otherness' and positioning them as deserving of violence and death.

We are left wondering whether the slaughter at the Nador-Melilla border will be a major step forward in normalising the violent military strategies implemented jointly by Moroccan and Spanish forces.

## **Accounts from victims/survivors**

For years, migrant communities have been telling their stories of the border in a narrative that prioritises human rights and acknowledges the humanity of people on the move. Community leaders and relatives of people who have died or gone missing at the border have created mutual support networks and developed strategies to resist the appalling violence meted out as part of a necropolitics.

In this case, members of the Sudanese community, who have fled from years of terrible, protracted conflict, are well aware of their rights as refugees. They have a strong collective awareness and organise alongside victims/survivors of other nationalities to bravely share the truth of the events that took place.

*“The auxiliary forces beat me with a truncheon and called me a dirty nigger. They trampled me with their boots and I felt my bones break. I saw the bodies of the people who died. There were about 30 of them. They called an ambulance to take us away and the bodies were put in the same ambulance. We arrived at the hospital and they left us all on the floor, both the dead and the injured. My friend spent four days in a coma before waking up. He was hit in the head with a bullet. The soldiers killed us, I saw it with my own eyes. I’m alive. God kept me alive, but I’ve lost five friends. I saw them die with my own eyes.”*

*“Hatred has been stirred up among the general population. People who were living in houses are being kicked out. At the border with Algeria, there’s a constant flow of deported people. They all have injuries on their bodies, backs and heads. It’s hard to bear the pain when you see them. It’s enough to make you cry seeing human beings treated like this. I tell them: “Be strong, my brother. You have to be strong.” But it’s difficult when you see the situation they’re in. Even drinking water brings the risk of disease. They want to hide the truth of how migrants are living, how their rights are destroyed, how they trample on asylum seekers and burn their passports and any other documents they have.”*

*“We experienced hell itself. Our hands are swollen because the auxiliary forces beat us with iron bars on our ankles so that we couldn’t walk. If they find out you’re from Sudan or Chad, they torture you when they detain you. In our group, there are 13-year-*

*old children. They came on foot at night, fleeing from the soldiers and the people. Because they've told the population not to let us take transport. There are soldiers and police officers in plain clothes and when they see you in the city they come straight over to ask for your papers. If you're from Sudan or Chad, even if you have papers they call the van and take you to the holding cell or deport you to the border."*

*"We received so many insults during our journey to Nador, when we went to the hospital or approached people. They [plain clothes police officers] asked what we were doing there and I told them that I'd come to look for my missing brother. Then they said that they had already been to the embassies and that they hadn't found anyone because nobody was missing. I showed them my papers and they told me to go back to my city because I'd have problems in Nador if they saw me here again."*

*"Inside, my friends had fallen to the ground. You can't see with the gas. You have to close your eyes because it blinds you, it's better that way, so you can't see. Then when you fall over, they search you from head to toe. They take everything you have, your money, your phone, and they keep it for themselves. One comes and steals from you, then another, and that's what they do while we're injured. I had 24 dirhams, one of them had already taken my phone. Another took the 20 dirham note but he left me the 4 dirham coins. But another one came and he took those from me too. Every one of them hurts you in one way or another, they have no mercy."*

*"They came two days in a row. They were beating people; they don't want people in the wood. They came on Wednesday and attacked us. Then again on Thursday, they beat us up. So on Friday, we decided to flee to the border. When we were there, they beat us badly. Many Sudanese people died, many Sudanese people were injured. They were beating people with truncheons and spraying gas. From 08:00 to 14:00, they were beating people. Lots of people died but we can't do anything, we're just travellers. Now we don't even know what we're going to eat or what we're going to do. They beat us even after we were sent for deportation. The Moroccans treat us really badly. I want everyone to know that a lot of people are dead and that we need help."*

*"I was in shock, they beat me badly. I can't remember much right now. They hit my brother on the head, they hit me on the head and on the abdomen. They were wearing very, very big shoes to hit me, to hit us. Many, many people were on the ground. It was really tough. Many, many people died. Many, many people. Even*

*my brother who saved me. I haven't seen him since. They gave me this really big [wound] before taking me to be transported to Oujda. The police beat us and told us we were dogs and we were stupid."*

*"Hello, how are you? I hope you're well. I'm sending you this message because of the situation, to tell you how we're coping. Here, refugees are facing many problems. They face many problems when they cross the border with Morocco. Some were injured when they entered the hole in the hill. Others were injured when they tried to cross the border fence. They were injured there and they're in a very bad state now... Nobody can understand what's happening. They're trying to hold on but they can't. We're very grateful for the help we've received and for what has been done for us. We'd be very grateful if you could help us a bit. I'm trying to help these people, who are my people. I represent them, I'm one of the leaders of their clan. They asked me to send you this message. We wish you all the best. May God be with you."*



**EVERYONE FOR  
THEMSELVES**

**LEAVE NO ONE  
UNBEHIND**

**DEFEND  
YOURSELF NOT  
TO DIE**

A REPORT BY:

**CA-MINANDO  
FRONTERAS**

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:

