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Morocco / Western Sahara: Investigate migrants' deaths

Amnesty International today called on the Moroccan government to immediately open a comprehensive, independent and impartial investigation into claims that at least 28 migrants drowned at sea after their boat was jostled and punctured by members of the Moroccan security forces.

Amnesty International has spoken to some of the survivors. According to their testimonies at least 28 people drowned, including four children aged between two and four years old. One Nigerian woman said her daughter Soses, aged three years and four months, was among the dead.

Moroccan authorities have categorically denied that anyone in the security forces was responsible for these deaths at sea, off the port of Al Hoceima, on Monday 28 April. They said that the security forces had rescued people about to die and also collected ten bodies.

Survivors of the drowning said that the inflatable boat which 72 of them had boarded was approached by four Moroccan members of the security forces on a boat, who asked them to stop. The migrants said that they refused to stop so the Moroccan security forces came closer to their boat, started to shake it, and then one member of the security forces punctured the inflatable boat in four places with a knife.

The survivors of the drowning were rescued by two other boats of the Moroccan security forces and taken back to land. Some of the dead bodies were also reportedly transported back to the shore. Once on land, two survivors were taken to hospital, while the others were taken to a police station where their photographs and fingerprints were taken. They told Amnesty International that they were later taken on a truck over night and left near the city of Oujda, at the frontier with Algeria, in what appears to be a summary expulsion.

“We have asked for an investigation into these deaths, that the results are made public and that anyone found responsible for causing the deaths be brought to justice,” said Amnesty International.

“However, previous investigations opened by the Moroccan authorities into migrants shot dead in Ceuta and Mellila in 2005 and in Western Sahara in 2007 have not so far been concluded. The Moroccan authorities must give a clear signal that, if there is a case to answer, the security forces will be held accountable.”