

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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MALTA: Responsibility to rescue and protect people at sea scarcely addressed in review

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Malta

Since Malta's last review, hundreds of thousands of people have attempted to reach safety in Europe by crossing the central Mediterranean on overcrowded, unseaworthy boats. Thousands have drowned trying.

The central Mediterranean route cuts through Malta's vast search and rescue region, engaging its responsibility to ensure assistance at sea and disembarkation in a safe port.

Yet, Malta has displayed little inclination to expand rescue efforts and to ensure prompt disembarkation in a place of safety. Malta first relied on disembarkation in Italy, and now assists Libyan authorities in intercepting people and bringing them back to Libya where they are not safe.

Malta is not solely responsible for the fate of people in the central Mediterranean. Amnesty International has criticized Italian and European policies exposing refugees and migrants to the risk of being returned to Libya. It has also criticized Europe's failure to agree on a predictable disembarkation and relocation arrangement in Europe.

Amnesty International is concerned, however, about Malta's role in transferring to Libya the coordination of rescue operations and in obstructing rescue activities by NGOs.

On repeated occasions last year, Malta refused disembarkation, exposing exhausted and traumatized individuals to prolonged sea journeys, while arguing over which country should allow them into their ports. Malta's near-blanket refusal to allow disembarkations is aggravating risks for refugees and migrants and must stop. Amnesty International regrets Malta's rejection of the one recommendation it received on this matter and deplores that only Brazil raised this issue.¹ The silence from European states speaks volumes about their collective failure to address the needs of refugees and migrants in the central Mediterranean.

Amnesty International welcomes the recommendations regarding the killing of Daphne Caruana Galizia, three of which call for accountability for her death.² Malta has accepted the recommendation to spare no efforts in fully investigating her death and ensuring there is no impunity. However, as recently noted in a Council of Europe report, there is no credible evidence that Malta is investigating who planned and commissioned the killing. Amnesty International urges Malta to carry out without delay an independent and effective public inquiry and deeply regrets Malta's rejection of a recommendation to do so.³

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Malta on 15 March 2019 during its 40th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered this oral statement.

¹ A/HRC/40/17, recommendation 111.38 (Brazil)

² A/HRC/40/17, recommendations 110.53 (Slovenia), 110.54 (Iceland), 111.27 (Switzerland), 111.28 (Brazil)

³ A/HRC/40/17, 111.128 (Brazil)

Amnesty International also contributed the following recommendations to Malta:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur33/9202/2018/en/>

Public Document

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