

# Update from Melilla 30/10/2021

An update from our team in [#Melilla](#) (Spain): over the last two weeks, we have continued to carry out our project of social intervention with people on the move living in the street here.

We use the Skate Park as a common space to offer recreational activities, playing games of Jenga and football, and sharing positive interactions with the guys. Meanwhile, the migratory situation here on the ground remains unchanged.

And the Guardia Civil admits as much: when the sound of sirens and a helicopter alerted us to their activities along the fence with Morocco just last week, as we tried to get closer to properly observe, a Guardia Civil stopped us, claiming that this was just 'business as normal'.

'Business as normal' consists of a deadly combination of racial and economic inequality, police violence, and inhumane border policy, which forces people on the move to risk their lives.

It is what forced the older brother of a 16-year-old boy in the Skate Park - just as it did him - to risk his life, swimming for hours to get to Melilla from Morocco. He drowned in the sea, and the boy is left scrolling through the photos and stories posted by grieving friends and family members on Facebook and Instagram.

## Have you read our report? || Update on developments in Melilla

27.10.2021

Considering the impacts of the episodes of extreme border violence during May 2021 and placing this in a historical context of illegal migrant pushbacks and human rights violations from the Spanish enclaves to Morocco, [we have published a report on the situation in Ceuta and Melilla, looking at the continued and increasing state repression of people on the move.](#) This report was researched and written by the Disinfaux Collective, No Name Kitchen and Solidary Wheels, and published by the Border Violence Monitoring Network.

The report examines the context of the enclaves as places of transit, analysing developments around the fence, sea crossings and local border mobility. Combining first-hand accounts of people subjected to violent returns, as well as an overview of the actors and surveillance technologies involved, it outlines the constitution of the enclaves as a tool of deterrence and abuse.

The report focuses primarily on the events of May 2021 and beyond, when thousands of sub-Saharan and people from neighbouring Moroccan cities crossed into Ceuta and Melilla by land and sea. The way in which the Spanish and Moroccan authorities dealt with this large-scale transit reveals existing patterns of collective expulsions and police brutality.

Despite the fact that these regions are internationally accepted as Spanish, and therefore part of the European Union, people on the move there are treated differently, creating a legal pretext for forced expulsions, and the subsequent violence inherent to these processes. A recent example is what happened on 13 August when Spain and Morocco initiated a mass pushback operation, ultimately resulting in 54 minors being returned from Ceuta (and 2 minors from Melilla), in violation of Spanish child protection law and international law too.

Additionally, the pandemic and the closure of the border for a year and a half have affected the situation in Ceuta and Melilla, in terms of the mobility of people entering from Morocco, and the use of racist violence to control it and repress it, showing an escalation and expansion of violence carried out using racial profiling.

Regarding pushbacks (also known as hot returns), after the expulsion of 4 people (including 2 minors) on 26 July, AMDH reported the return of another 2 on 28 July. During the month of August, these unlawful express returns were repeated.

More recently, in the period of August and September, entries by sea were intensified: 125 people arrived at Vélez de la Gomera on 20 September, 41 people at Isla de Tierra on 21 August and 2 people at the Chafarinas Islands on 18 September. All these people have been returned to Morocco, although many had requested international protection. On Isla de Tierra, the anti-riot unit and the Guardia Civil used violence against the arriving migrants, with tear gas and batons. At least 10 migrants have died in the sea off Melilla this year, either having fallen in while crossing the border or trying to board the ferry to mainland Spain. The arrival of bodies at the port of Melilla is not uncommon. The last two deaths were on 10 August and 21 September.

In recent months the tension at Melilla's borders has persisted, due to the increase in mass crossings. The available record, where many entries are not counted, indicates that during the period from 17 August to 30 September there were at least 1,294 attempts to enter the city of Melilla from Morocco, mostly by attempting to jump but also by swimming all the way (which can take from 6 to 8 hours). The vast majority of these attempts were prevented by the Moroccan and Spanish police, who collaborate in the control of the Spanish borders (externalisation of European and Spanish borders) through excessive police violence, among other tactics that violate the human rights of migrants.

However, we do have some good news this week: the Spanish government has passed a new law, which will help facilitate the obtention of documents, and speed up the regularisation process in the long term.

VIDEO DOWNLOADED

# The Criminalisation of Solidarity: the biggest obstacle for human rights activists

2.10.2021

When I decided to travel to Melilla to work on the ground with the Solidary Wheels team of volunteers, I expected many things.

I expected everything that someone who has worked in migrant social work can expect from a border territory.

Hostility, violence.

The sight of a paralysed life, waiting for the day when it will simply be time to stop waiting.

Waiting for your human rights to become effective in the eyes of the world.

For the bodies and lives of so many people to stop being invisible.

I imagined what it would be like to deal with injustice.

To carry out legal accompaniment work, or social intervention with minors, young people and families, who are part of the most essential fabric of a city that turns its back on them in so many ways.

But what I didn't imagine, or at least I never visualised it so explicitly, was that in the course of this work in defence of human rights, I would find myself so vulnerable. So criticised.

So targeted, so violated.

We volunteers (specifically those of us who are part of the Solidary Wheels team) are witnesses every day to the physical, psychological and administrative violence that is exercised against all the people in transit and racialised people who live in the Autonomous City.

Of the tactics of humiliation and aggression on the part of the police force.

Of the bureaucratic labyrinth, and the administrative violence that is caused by the long waits and procedures of each administration.

Of the strategies of fraud and manipulation by some citizens who take advantage of the vulnerability of the young people in exile.

Our job is to accompany these people.

So we could say that this secondhand violence that we experience is part of the emotional impact of the work that we do as activists.

Because when you work on the ground in defence of people's rights, you find out that violence, intimidation and social pressure are also personally directed at you.

This, I discovered, is known as the criminalisation of solidarity.

And it is a concept that should be more often part of the conversation within social groups, in activism, in the culture of organisations and in any holistic education that we as citizens believe we need to build a more just future.

The UN "Declaration on Human Rights Defenders" states that everyone (individually or organised in association) has the right to promote human rights and fundamental freedom and to seek and receive resources for that purpose. The state has the responsibility to provide an enabling environment to implement these activities and "the state must take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of all against any violence, threats, reprisals, discrimination or arbitrary action against the exercise of their rights".

Far from the fulfilment and consideration of this UN Declaration, those of us who work in activism, whether in a border territory such as Melilla or in any other cause for the defence of rights, feel unprotected, by the laws and the security forces, by the administrations and also by civil society.

We face continuous social judgement as well as lawsuits.

We are identified by the authorities while doing our work.

We receive threats, fines and police persecution.

In Melilla, accompanying someone to the border to carry out a consultation on their legal situation, in the exercise of your duties, may entail the risk of facing the arbitrary aggressiveness of people who treat you as if your presence there, in addition to being a threat, were some kind of crime.

Tasks such as assisting and delivering food to people living on the streets are criminalised.

It seems that we, activists and workers of an Association, have invented, shaped and been the creators of the so-called "Call Effect".

One day, we had to stop and listen to the claim that our presence in a certain place in the city was a call upon these people to be on the streets.

Dealing with the incomprehension of an unjust society, which not only looks the other way, but seeks to blame and condemn those who work in the field of solidarity, seems to have become one of the core elements of this work.

In Paris and Calais, French authorities and police try to deter humanitarian assistance to migrants through administrative means (e.g. by issuing car tickets, preventing food distribution) and through violence, harassment, intimidation, arrest and prosecution. An investigation identified 600 incidents of intimidation and violence by the police against volunteers between November 2017 and July 2018 in the Calais region.

In Spain, after a failed criminal investigation against her, Spanish journalist and human rights activist Helena Maleno was taken to court in Morocco on the grounds of allegedly collaborating with human traffickers due to her work to protect migrants in the Mediterranean Sea between Morocco and Spain. She was finally absolved in April 2019 due to lack of evidence.

NGOs carrying out search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea are also being accused of scheming with smugglers and creating "pull factors" that some claim would attract migrants to Europe. In particular, following the release of the film "Mediterraneo", some political groups are accusing the founders of Open Arms of being "mafia traffickers".

Recently, Domenico Lucano, has been sentenced to thirteen years in prison for alleged offences in the reception of migrants, which was carried out in his village, Riace, in Italy, which was known for its model of hosting which assisted hundreds of people and families.

These are some examples of the materialisation of this criminalisation of solidarity.

But there are daily threats that intimidate the everyday work of volunteers and activists in the city of Melilla. People who are often citizens of the Autonomous City.

It is necessary to raise awareness and make people aware of this issue, because in order to defend human rights, we also have to protect ourselves.

To feel supported, or simply free.