



PERMANENT PEOPLES' TRIBUNAL

Founder:

LELIO BASSO (ITALY)

President:

PHILIPPE TEXIER (FRANCE)

Vicepresidents:

LUIZA ERUNDINA DE SOUSA (BRAZIL)

JAVIER GIRALDO MORENO (COLOMBIA)

HELEN JARVIS (AUSTRALIA-CAMBODIA)

NELLO ROSSI (ITALY)

General Secretariat:

SIMONA FRAUDATARIO (ITALY)

GIANNI TOGNONI (ITALY)

56° SESSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST MIGRANTS BY THE MAGHREB STATES, THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

PRESS RELEASE

VIA DELLA DOGANA VECCHIA 5 - 00186 ROME - TEL:0039 066879953
E-mail:ppt@permanentpeopletribunal.org ; permanentpeopletribunal@gmail.com
www.permanentpeopletribunal.org

The Maghreb countries are responsible of crimes against humanity in their treatment of migrants.

The European Union is also responsible due to its financial aid to these States and its ongoing policy of externalising borders.

Rabat, 31 March 2026.

The **Permanent Peoples' Tribunal**¹ (PPT) held a session in Palermo, Italy, on 23-25 October 2025, during Festival Sabir organised by Arci, to examine evidence of human rights violations amounting to **crimes against humanity, as defined in Article 7 of the Rome Statute**, presented by victims from various African countries.

The members of the Panel of Judges at the 56th session of the PPT² found that Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia are responsible for countless and repeated violations of the human rights of migrants, particularly those from the sub-Saharan region.

The Tribunal “notes the existence of a systematic criminalisation of solidarity, based on racial and political grounds **and reinforced by the European Union’s border externalisation policies, particularly against members of civil society**”, as emphasised in the Judgement presented today.

The judges point out that discrimination against black populations of Sub-Saharan origin is part of North Africa's long history of persecution. Today, xenophobic and populist rhetoric fuels the rejection and persecution of these populations. “A similar phenomenon to that in Europe exists in the Maghreb, where a blanket rejection of immigration — rooted in a racist historical context and dominant identity-based rhetoric — coexists with an economic need for immigrants,” stated **Sophie Bessis, President of the Panel of Judges**.

Christian Agbor, a Nigerian national who was detained and tortured in Libya, explained that, upon his arrival in Italy, rather than receiving protection, was arrested and detained for four months. He was falsely accused of migrant smuggling for activating the distress signal. He emphasised: “When I got off the boat, the first thing I experienced in Italy was prison. I wondered if it was my fault for being born black.”

A civil society activist active since 2011, who had visited numerous detention centres in Libya, including those in Ganfouda (Benghazi), Enzara and Zaouïa, as well as centres for women and minors in Tripoli, described a detention system largely controlled by militias, some of which are officially affiliated with the Ministry of the Interior, and supported materially and financially by the European

¹ [The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal](#), whose judgment is being presented, is an independent body established in 1979, whose founding charter is the [Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples](#), proclaimed in Algiers on July 4, 1976. It has conducted its work by holding 56 public sessions (the list is available [online](#))

² Sophie Bessis (Tunisia–France), President of the panel; Chadia Arab (France–Morocco); Amzat Boukari-Yabara (Benin–France); Wahid Ferchichi (Tunisia); Luca Maserà (Italy); Braulio Moro (France–Mexico).

Union. Testimonies and documents confirm the existence of slavery, servitude, sexual exploitation and forced labour, particularly against people from sub-Saharan Africa, Bangladesh and Syria.

The Tribunal observes that “through agreements in place since 2016 with transit States such as Turkey, Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, the European Union has outsourced migration control to authoritarian regimes, leading to the militarisation of borders and the delegation of violence to actors involved in human trafficking”.

Rose, another witness who spoke during the public hearings, described her capture by Libyan militias: “They chained us up, blindfolded us and sold us. They said: either you pay, you sell yourself, or you die”.

The hardening of the European’s approach in successive Commission policies has essentially resulted in **the migration chapter shifting from a priority and binding subject of international humanitarian law to a general security issue.**

The various pieces of evidence presented to the Panel of Judges are representative of the continuous chain of violations experienced by migrants. These include **failure to provide assistance at sea and attacks on rescue operations, pushbacks, abandonment in the desert and racial violence in Tunisia and the Maghreb, the criminalisation of civil society organisations in Tunisia, the repression of whistleblowers and trade unionists in Algeria, systemic discrimination and the criminalisation of solidarity, transnational repression of solidarity, failure to provide assistance and intentional shipwrecks, and arbitrary detention, torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.**

The Tribunal states that “Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, in coordination with European States such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Malta, are responsible for refusing or delaying intervention during shipwrecks in the central and eastern Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and for deliberately abandoning persons in distress”.

With regard to the European Union's responsibility, the Tribunal notes that the EU's and its member States' policies concerning external border control and the criminalisation of migration are part of a broader context of general erosion of human rights, the development of surveillance and control mechanisms for populations, security-oriented and/or bellicose rhetoric, the loss of state legitimacy and the deeply troubling rise of xenophobic and far-right movements across Europe, while Brussels promotes an aggressive trade policy to secure the natural resources of the African continent.

Human rights lawyer and prosecutor for this PPT session **Zakaria Benlahrech**, emphasised that this criminalisation transcends national borders and becomes part of a regional strategy supported by the European Union. “It is no longer migration that is being criminalised; it is solidarity.”

“Rescuing migrants at sea, providing them with shelter and food, documenting deportations or acts of violence: these actions are compared to criminal offences, often under the guise of anti-terrorism or security legislation. This repression creates a climate of widespread fear, leading to self-censorship among journalists, the withdrawal of NGOs and the weakening of protection mechanisms”.

In its conclusions, the Tribunal highlights the systemic nature of human rights violations against migrants by the Maghreb States (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), as well as Libya and Mauritania, through their policies aimed at repressing migration flows. However, according to the Tribunal, the

systemic nature of the violations does not preclude attributing them to specific parties responsible, **whether States or individuals**. In other words, the indisputable fact that the violations in question are systematic must not serve as a pretext for preventing the establishment of any liability.

“With regard to crimes committed against migrants, **international law and national legislation constitute a robust body of legal provisions that protect their rights**. These provisions range from the principle of non-refoulement to the constitutional recognition of the right to asylum in many of the countries concerned. However, **rights recognised in theory are often violated in practice**. The Tribunal’s decision aims to contribute to the **development of strategic litigation**, with the essential support of the organisations that requested this session³ and the many others active in defending migrants’ rights, to help bring justice to the victims.”

PRESS CONTACTS:

Gianni Tognoni: **+39 3471824914**

Kamal Lahbib: **+212 661142460**

³ 54 organizations represented by the Maghreb Social Forum, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), and the Forum for Moroccan Alternatives (FMAS).