

NO
MORE

RESISTANCES AT THE BORDERS

COMMEMORATION 2025: VOICES OF STRUGGLE
AND MEMORY BEYOND THE BORDERS

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PROJET
MEMMED

Resistances at the Borders is a **monthly column** that is part of the **NoMore: Monitoring Italian-Tunisian Border Practices project**, a **Mem.Med: Memoria Mediterranea** initiative funded by **Oxfam Italia**.

The column was created as a **collective writing and awareness-raising workshop**, where members of Mem.Med, people in movement, and activists work together to **collect and share stories lived at the borders**. Through a **narrative from the margins**, the aim is to restore dignity and value to the experiences of those who face migration, while denouncing the violence and injustices that emerge from border management policies.

The column is coordinated by Ludovica Gualandi, with the **graphic design** by Sofia Baraldo.

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COMMEMORATION: THE MEMORY OF THE BORDERS THAT KILL.

"Neither forgiveness nor erasure! Freedom of movement for all!" This is the motto that echoes in various cities on the North and South shores of the Mediterranean, **every February 6th**. On this date, now eleven years ago, in **2014, the Spanish Civil Guard used riot control materials against more than 200 people attempting to reach the Spanish coast, to prevent them from reaching the colonial city of Ceuta**. Dozens of them drowned, while Moroccan authorities stood by, indifferent to the massacre. Only 15 bodies were recovered, and dozens of people remain missing to this day. The survivors were pushed back into Morocco, and some of them died in the following weeks due to the injuries they had sustained.

In the years that followed, the date of that massacre, **February 6, 2014, became a symbol of border violence that continues relentlessly to wound, kill, and make people disappear with impunity**. A symbol of the racism and classism that structure this violence. A symbol of the suffering of the people left behind, waiting for news, a body, truth, and justice. And it is from them, from those who wait for their loved ones who left, that the need to denounce and remember was born. **From the meeting between families and activists fighting for a borderless world, CommemorAction was born, a ² collective moment that encompasses both the commemorative and the political action dimension**. This date has thus become a symbol of persistence in remembering, a determined will to be seen and recognized, despite the continuous and repeated attempts to erase the memory of those who have not resigned themselves to the condition of immobility imposed by Western countries. **This year, CommemorAction took place in over 30 cities, in 13 different countries across the two shores of the Mediterranean, involving hundreds of people. We set off for Morocco and Tunisia to collect the voices of the women who energize and make these events resonate.**



Ph. Sofia Stimmatini, CommemorAction Oujda, Morocco

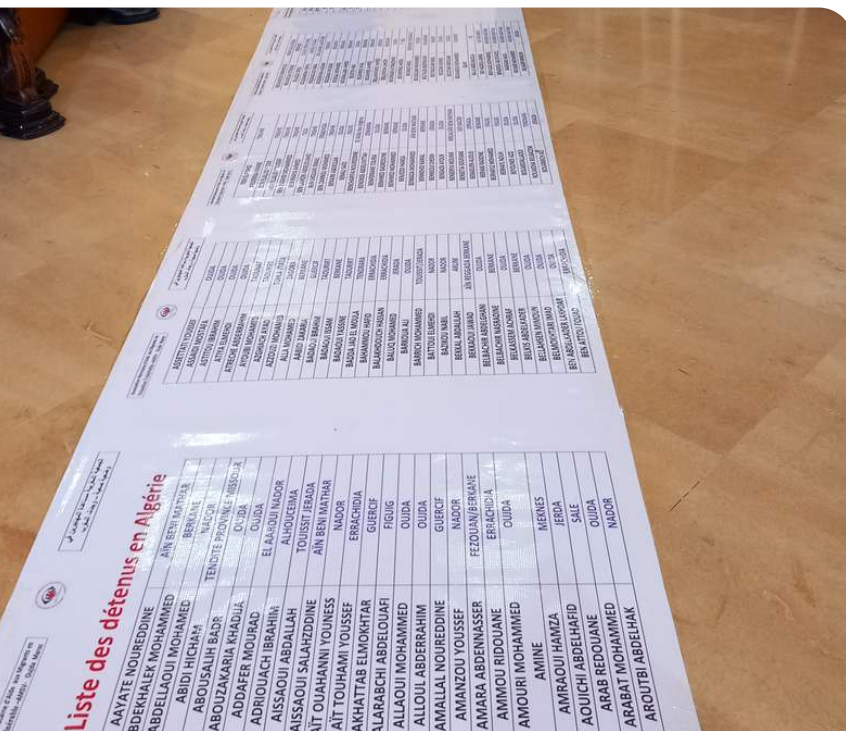
1. <https://www.meltingpot.org/tag/strage-di-tarajal-ceuta/>
2. <https://commemoraction.net/>

3 COMMEMORATION IN OUJDA: FACES AND NAMES AGAINST ERASURE

Ph. Sofia Stimmadini, list of names of people detained in Algeria



Ph. Sofia Stimmadini, list of names of people detained in Algeria



The room where families and activists gather is full of people. On the windowed wall, some are sticking photos. They climb onto chairs to arrange them in order, carefully attaching them, making sure that no face is covered or overshadowed. **The photos taken materialize the absence of the people missing in Tunisia, Spain, Algeria, Libya, the Balkans, at sea, in the ocean.** One thing unites them: the absence of news and of a body. **On the floor, a long list of names is spread out, and around it, many women and some men scrutinize the list, searching for a name.** They search with anguish, and when they find it, they point it out enthusiastically, take photos, and their faces soften. **This list brings together the names of Moroccan detainees in Algeria. Unlike the families whose loved ones are pictured on the windows, these have learned that their loved one is alive. They are alive, but detained.** In the room, there are about a hundred people, mostly women, but also men and children. They are sitting on the chairs arranged to welcome them. **They have come from different parts of Morocco, from Agadir, Beni Mellal, Casablanca, Rabat, Fes. They responded to the call made by the Association for Migrants in Vulnerable Situations (AMSV), which organized this CommemorAction in Oujda, on February 6-7, just like last year's and the year before's.**



Ph. Sofia Stimmadini, photographs of Moroccan citizens missing in the border areas and members of their families.

VOICES OF MOTHERS IN STRUGGLE

Among the women who speak up after the formalities, some are more determined than others. **Fatima**, for example, takes the microphone with emphasis and speaks to the other women. She tells her story: **she is the mother of Oussama, a young man who decided to leave Tunisia for Italy with 32 other people. Since December 16, 2021, Fatima has no idea what happened: after they set out to sea that night, the young people stopped sending news.** The Tunisian authorities returned three bodies, but there's no sign of her son. Since that December, **Fatima has been searching, not accepting the mere absence of her son, and she wants answers. She participates in many public events and often asks herself: 'The question is: who is responsible?'** I am just one of these 33 mothers. We are suffering day and night. We can't sleep anymore.

We are in a bad situation. *"Who is responsible?"* In front of dozens of people, Fatima shares her experience and urges the other families to confront head-on the issue of the **responsibility for the violence at the border.** Where is her son's body? Where is the truth? And justice? These questions remain blunt, suspended in the crowded room. Then Fatima returns to her seat, accompanied by the intense and sharp cries of some women.

Hafida L. also speaks up, shouting and crying. **Her brother Mohammed left the shores of Rabat on September 4, 2021, and nothing has been heard from him or his 15 companions since.** Is this a phantom shipwreck? No one can say. No one dares to say it. No one takes responsibility for confirming it. Like Fatima, she tells of her search for her brother, the political awareness journey she has undertaken with this disappearance. **During the CommemorAction, Hafida deeply criticizes the corrupt system of Moroccan society, highlighting the institutional abandonment that the families of the missing suffer. Not only that, but Hafida protests with her body and her voice the European migration policies that took her brother away, blaming the neocolonial control that the northern countries exercise over her own country.** Hafida often says it: she fights against exclusion and marginalization, for social justice and equality. She wants the truth!

These words resonate with the chants that the families repeat the next day during the stages of the journey to Saidia, a town located on the northern Moroccan coast, at the border with Algeria. When we stop at a point on the Morocco-Algeria border, closed since 1994, the families shout loud and clear: **"Where are you, the responsible people, while parents and relatives are suffering?"** On the other side, **after the ditches and barbed wire, Algerian and Palestinian flags flutter in the wind,** and some people stop, get out of their cars, and greet us. The families respond enthusiastically, and for a moment, it seems as if the physical barriers that prevent them from reaching each other for a single march against erasure are forgotten."

Later, walking towards the beach in Saidia, the families pick up the chants again, led by the members of AMSV: **'Why are we here? We want our children! We are here because we want justice! The people want the truth about the missing!'** They wave banners bearing the faces of the missing and display the photos of their children, their brothers and sisters, and their husbands. Upon reaching the beach, they position themselves in front of the sea, with the banners and photos clearly visible, and observe a minute of silence, dedicated to all those who have not been heard from, to all those who have lost their lives due to the borders, and to the Palestinian people who are suffering a genocide before everyone's eyes. **Many families look towards Algeria, which is just a few meters away. On the beach, there are no ditches or barbed wire. This political line could be crossed with just one step, if, on the other side of the border, Algerian law enforcement officers were not watching us with questioning and suspicious eyes.**

The closure of the border, more than thirty years ago, has deeply impacted the border populations, and the still deeply tense relations between the two countries today make the journey that certain people choose to reach Europe complex. As **Hassan A., president of AMSV, explains, if they are not arrested on Algerian territory, people attempting to migrate from Algeria are often pushed back by the Algerian coast guard, arrested, and sentenced to prison terms according to law 08-11.** They serve sentences that vary in length, depending on their involvement in organizing the journey. Hassan reports that **the Algerian authorities do not inform the Moroccan consulate of the presence of Moroccan citizens in their prisons.** These people disappear temporarily until their families, accompanied by Hassan and his association, manage to locate them. These detentions show the climate of **criminalization and exploitation of migration**, in a regional context that is already tense on many fronts. From time to time, groups of people are released: 'The day before yesterday, 42 people were released, a few days ago a group of 32,' says Hassan, interviewed at the beginning of March. These modest successes motivate other families to turn to the association: 'We receive dossiers every day, we currently have 600 dossiers,' explains the president, who confides that he is nevertheless satisfied with the work done in the last three years because the families are daring to speak more and more, daring to demand to know where their children are.

In Morocco, in fact, it is not so simple to speak up, to claim, to take to the streets. Hassan and his association argue that **CommemorAction is an important moment to give a voice to the families and to lift the veil of impunity from the issue of disappearances in migration contexts.** He states, 'CommemorAction has a political purpose. We are politicizing the issue, little by little.'



Ph. Sofia Stimmadini, photographs of Moroccan citizens missing in the border areas.

Families often feel responsible for the disappearance because they were aware of the journey or simply because they know that their loved ones did something considered illegal and therefore illegitimate. It is not always easy to express, to bring the individual experience into a collective dimension, to transform suffering into action, and to demand that states take responsibility for the violence they exercise. This is what Fatima and Hafida do by sharing their pain and anger, encouraging other families to demand truth and justice!"



Ph. Sofia Stimmatini, Saïdia beach, CommemorAction 2025

MEMORY AND RESISTANCE IN TUNISIA: THE COMMEMORATION OF MENZEL BOURGUIBA

Even in Tunisia, on **February 6, 2025**, several moments of demonstration took place for the **CommemorAction to remember the victims of migration**. However, the political and social context made it particularly difficult to organize such events. In recent years, **the country has witnessed an intensification of repression against civil society, with the arrest of activists, political opponents, and members of non-governmental organizations**. This growing **criminalization** has forced the families of the victims and associations, such as the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, **to adopt extreme caution in organizing the commemorations**. The traditional public demonstrations in front of symbols of power have been replaced by more discreet and intimate meetings. **In Menzel Bourguiba, a small town near Bizerte, a group of mothers decided to gather independently under the name of Mem.Med, an association that includes Jalila T., to honor the memory of their missing loved ones. Despite the difficulties, the voices of Tunisian families continue to resonate powerfully**



Ph. Séverine Sajous, CommemorAction 2025, some of the mothers and sisters who lost a loved one in the Mediterranean.

Jalila is the mother of two boys who left in November 2019 with four other friends and died during the journey when a storm struck the boat they were traveling on. The sea returned the bodies of her two sons, but they were buried without authorization in two Sicilian municipalities. Once the graves were discovered, **Jalila fought tirelessly to bring her sons home to Tunisia, to the town of Menzel Bourguiba, where they now rest, under her caring gaze.**

Since she lost her children, **Jalila has never stopped fighting, not even when she discovered their death.** In fact, from that moment on, **she began fighting for the other families—those who are searching, those who are starting to search, those who cannot search. The idea for the CommemorAction in Menzel Bourguiba came from Jalila herself: 'I liked the idea that this time it would be our CommemorAction, to put the name of Mem.med as a participant. It's not that I didn't want to participate with other associations or organizations, but I told myself: I am capable of managing a CommemorAction,' she says, interviewed in mid-March.**



Ph. Jalila Taamallah, photo of little Anas, who died in the Mediterranean on February 5, 2024.

For Jalila, it was particularly important to organize this event this year in Menzel Bourguiba because it coincides with the anniversary of the shipwreck on February 5, 2023, when 19 people lost their lives, including Anas Zwebi, a 5-year-old child. Leaving from this town on the northern Tunisian coast, the 19 never reached their destination, and only some bodies were recovered, including that of Anas, who is now buried in the town where he was born.



Ph. Séverine Sajous, Jalila T. and Hajer A. decorating with flowers the photos of the faces of their loved ones missing or deceased at the border

Jalila then called the families of the people from Menzel Bourguiba who were missing or deceased. She then printed the photos, prepared the banners, spread the information, and on the day of February 6, 2025, she and the women who responded to the call gathered at the shore of the sea. **'I liked the idea of doing it [the CommemorAction] by the sea, and I've already done it by the sea. It was the starting point for almost everyone who lives in Menzel Bourguiba. Some families have recovered the bodies. Other families are still searching,'** says Jalila, emphasizing the symbolic importance of stopping in front of the sea. **Jalila explains that they decided to perform two different gestures, depending on the fate of the person being remembered: 'The mothers who had already recovered the bodies lit candles, and we read a bit of the Quran. And for the mothers who still don't know, they threw flowers.'** She continues: **'It's the first time we've done something like this'.**



Ph. Séverine Sajous, Jalila Taamallah showing to the sea the photo of her sons Hedi and Mehdi, who passed away in 2019 in the Mediterranean

*'The idea was liked because there were many mothers and participants. Some do not have missing relatives, but they appreciated what we were doing. They wanted to participate with us. The mothers liked the fact that they read the Quran and lit the candles. And they asked why we had to throw the flowers into the sea. Then I explained why we had to do it. It's just... it's a hope for the mothers. They did it with love... **They understood what the context of this flower in the sea was. And they did it out of love.'*** Jalila gets emotional as she tells the story. She pauses on the gesture of throwing the flower: for Jalila, the **absence of a body is the central issue in many stories of disappearances: "When there is no body, you are in mourning, but you don't know when it will end. You don't have a date. You live the mourning every day.**



Ph. Jalila Taamallah, CommemorAction 2025, candles and flowers for the deceased and missing loved ones in search of freedom

Jalila emphasizes the daily renewal of the pain experienced by the families of the missing and **highlights the injustice perpetrated 'by our state and yours, even the Italian one!'** She confides that it was a 'long,' 'heavy' day, a day accompanied by tears, but an important day, because **'to address the states, it is not [necessary] a message from an association or an activist. No, it is [necessary] a message that comes from the heart of a mother. We hope, therefore, that the message reaches where we want, to the authorities!'**

Jalila and the families of Menzel Bourguiba do not give up, despite the increasingly tense and repressive political climate in Tunisia.

The voices of Fatima, Hafida, Jalila, coming from Morocco and Tunisia, are voices full of emotion, full of pain, and full of vital strength, that of the anger at injustice. **In a migratory context that shows no signs of changing, the voices of the mothers and sisters of the missing or deceased must be heard. There is a need for silence and for listening to these stories of search and resistance. The CommemorAction can become this space for speech, for listening, for denunciation, and for remembrance: during these moments, the families, the migrants, and the activists collectively rebuild a living and resistant memory, vibrating against erasure.** Looking at a Mediterranean Sea that has become a mass grave, we must listen to and learn from those women who dare to challenge the imposition of ordinary forgetfulness by demanding remembrance, demanding the bodies, demanding a world in which one can travel freely: **'neither forgiveness, nor erasure!'**



Ph. Jalila Taamallah, banners with the slogans 'Neither forgiveness, nor erasure,' 'Migration is a right,' Menzel Bourguiba, CommemorAction 2025.