

# Disappearance along the migration routes



**Bildungswerk Berlin**  
der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

# Contents

Editorial

p. 1

The silent crisis of missing migrants in Libya

p. 3-6

Taking the bull by the horn: How we fight for  
freedom of movement in the Sahel and Sahara

By Moctar Dan Yayé p. 7-10

Legal framework p. 11-12

Sudan: enforced disappearances as  
a weapon of war p. 13-14

Interview with Asjad Alnoo p. 15-16

International Bodies and Agencies p. 18-19





# Editorial

The year 2024 has brought significant and alarming changes to Europe's migration and asylum landscape. In April, the European Parliament approved reforms to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), marking a shift toward expedited border procedures and expanded deportation powers—measures that have profoundly restricted access to asylum. These reforms coincided with a rise in right-wing populist influence in the European Parliament, despite a pro-European majority, intensifying pressure to tighten asylum laws. Meanwhile, the outsourcing of migration management remains fraught with controversy, as agreements such as the UK's with Rwanda collapse, and Italy's deal with Albania faces uncertainty. At the same time, Germany has introduced stricter deportation policies, including the resumption of removals to conflict zones like Afghanistan and Syria, while internal and external border controls have intensified across the EU.

As Europe fortifies itself with restrictive policies, the externalization of border management has created dangerous "grey zones" of accountability. Delegating border control to third countries not only diminishes transparency but also legitimizes practices that frequently skirt international law. Mechanisms such as pushbacks and inadequate rescue operations have forced migrants onto increasingly dangerous routes. These policies are not without grave consequences—thousands of lives are lost or unaccounted for each year, with over 40,000 individuals reported missing in the Mediterranean alone. The inaction of actors such as Frontex and national coastguards has contributed to a crisis where migrants are sent back to war zones

or abandoned in deserts, left at the mercy of smugglers or traffickers.

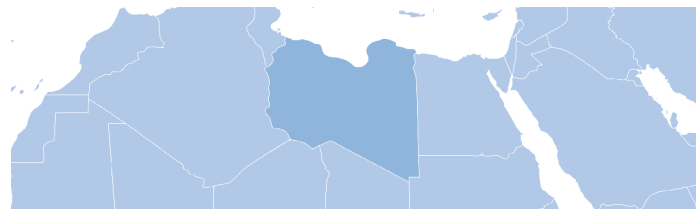
In this critical context, *borderline europe – Menschenrechte ohne Grenzen* in cooperation with Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich Böll Stiftung convened a panel discussion featuring voices from Libya, Sudan, and Niger—three regions deeply entangled in the phenomenon of missing migrants. The panelists shared firsthand insights into the human cost of Europe's externalized migration policies, exploring the social, economic, and political factors that perpetuate these tragedies. This brochure captures their perspectives and the urgent need for accountability, highlighting the invisible toll of restrictive migration regimes. Through their contributions and interviews, we aim to amplify the voices of those on the frontlines and deepen public understanding of the crisis unfolding across migration routes.





# The silent crisis of missing migrants in Libya

by Halima Mohamed



## LCW

Libya Crimes Watch (LCW) is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in Libya. Established in 2019 and registered in the United Kingdom, LCW operates through an extensive network covering all regions of Libya. The organization focuses on monitoring, documenting, and reporting human rights violations against civilians, striving to ensure accountability and combat impunity.

LCW's mission is multifaceted: it provides legal assistance to victims and survivors, advocates for justice and accountability, raises public awareness, and works to foster a culture of human rights and peace. Additionally, the organization engages in capacity-building initiatives to strengthen human rights practices in Libya, aiming to contribute to a more just and peaceful society.

Migrants in Libya, regardless of their country of origin, face grave human rights violations, including detention, forced labor, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, torture, and, in some cases, death. Libya, a key transit point for migrants from Africa and the Middle East seeking safety and opportunity in Europe, often proves to be anything but a haven. The harsh realities encountered by migrants starkly contrast with their hopes of refuge and security. Libya Crime Watch (LCW), through its field monitoring team, continues to document these systemic abuses and the persistent lack of effective mechanisms to safeguard migrants' rights.

The influx of migrants into Libya surged following the eruption of civil war in Sudan in April 2023, with over 100,000 Sudanese migrants entering the country according to UNHCR. They joined others from Chad, Niger, and beyond, crossing Libya's borders, particularly through the southeastern city of Kufra, a gateway controlled by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF). Many migrants face immediate detention upon arrival, often at the

hands of armed groups or security agencies linked to the Government of National Unity (GNU), such as the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM) or military units. Those detained endure appalling conditions characterized by cruel treatment, arbitrary detention without legal recourse, and systemic neglect.

For migrants who evade detention, dangers persist. The journey through Libya is fraught with exploitation, forced labor, and other grave risks. Between August 2023 and September 2024, LCW documented numerous cases of enforced disappearances and forced labor. Victims recounted experiences of being coerced into unpaid labor under exploitative conditions.

## Libya political and migratory situation

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has been mired in political division, with two rival governments: one in Tripoli led by Abdulhamid Dbeibah, backed by a presidential council and internationally recognised as the legitimate government, and another in Benghazi under Osama Hammad, de facto controlled by General Haftar's family. The country remains deeply fragmented with strong foreign influences, including Turkey, Egypt and Russia. Despite political instability and ongoing conflict, Libya remains a major destination and transit point for migrants, particularly from neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Niger, Chad and Sudan. Migrants face severe human rights violations, including arbitrary detention in overcrowded centres infamous for inhumane conditions, torture, sexual violence, and even death.

One survivor described entering Libya in a cargo truck after agreeing to pay the equivalent of 200 Libyan dinars. Unable to pay the fee upon arrival, he offered to work for the truck driver to settle the debt. Instead, he was detained on a farm and forced into unpaid labor for seven months. He worked daily from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., with no contact with the outside world, leaving his family to assume he had died in the desert.

Enforced disappearances remain a recurring tragedy. Migrants frequently vanish while crossing the desert or after being detained by security forces. In one case, the brother of a Sudanese migrant disappeared in Ajdabiya, eastern Libya. Despite information suggesting that an armed group had detained him, five months of searching yielded no answers. Requests to Libyan authorities for clarification went unanswered, leaving the family to believe he perished in the desert.

LCW field monitoring team also documented incidents of detentions involving minors aged 5-14 years. Security personnel have been conducting systematic detention operations targeting children in public spaces during recreational activities. While releases are typically processed upon parental intervention at police stations, families often spend between 12-24 hours locating their detained children.

During the period between September to October 2024, we documented two deaths involving toddlers aged two (2) and three (3) years in Sabha, southern Libya. These deaths resulted from a combination of medical negligence, malnutrition, and exposure to severe weather conditions in temporary shelter facilities. Neither state healthcare facilities nor international humanitarian organizations provided medical intervention during the documented cases of illness.

LCW has also documented systemic abuses within detention centers across Libya. Migrants





are held incommunicado for extended periods—sometimes as long as three (3) years—without access to legal representation or contact with their families. Many are subjected to forced labor, including cleaning, cooking, construction, and other tasks, effectively turning them into victims of enforced disappearance as their families remain unaware of their fate. These disappearances often occur in remote areas such as the desert regions between Kufra and Benghazi or between Sabha and Tripoli. The absence of effective search and rescue mechanisms exacerbates the plight of these migrants.

Additionally, authorities in both the East and the West handle the remains of deceased migrants found in the desert or on the coast with inconsistency and disorganization. In cases where victims are unidentified, proper documentation is rarely conducted. Migrants are often buried in unmarked graves without DNA samples or photographic records, making

it nearly impossible for families to locate or identify their loved ones.

In March 2024, the Criminal Investigation Agency of the Government of National Unity (GNU) announced the discovery of a mass grave containing Sixty-Five (65) bodies believed to be migrants. While the authorities claimed to have followed procedures, they provided no information about the identities of the victims, the circumstances of their deaths, or the time of their demise. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that Libyan authorities had not responded to inquiries regarding the grave.

Additionally, The General Authority for the Search and Identification of Missing Persons, operating exclusively in Tripoli, focuses primarily on locating Libyan nationals or investigating mass graves suspected to contain Libyan victims. Cases involving migrants receive significantly less attention, highlighting a discriminatory approach. Moreover, the lack of a unified national database for missing persons and the political divisions between Libya's east and west further obstruct efforts to locate missing individuals or achieve accountability for abuses. Both sides maintain separate records of missing persons and unidentified remains but refuse to share information, leaving families with little hope of answers.

The fragmented approach to addressing these issues, coupled with the absence of effective search and rescue systems in the desert and at sea, exposes migrants to preventable suffering and death. This systemic neglect underscores the urgent need for coordinated action.

The crisis of missing migrants in Libya is an urgent call to action for the international community and both Libyan governments. The challenges in search mechanisms,

compounded by the lack of coordination among authorities and the absence of documentation, create overwhelming obstacles. However, with the support and intervention of the international community, we can work towards a more effective response to this crisis. It is critical that we come together to ensure that no migrant's story remains lost and that families receive the closure they desperately seek.

It is imperative to establish mechanisms for the protection of migrants' rights, ensure accountability for abuses, and provide justice for the victims. LCW remains steadfast in its mission to shed light on these violations and advocate for the rights of all migrants in Libya.



## UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances

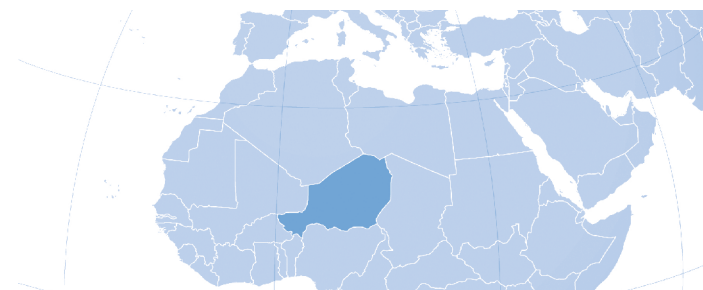
The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) is a United Nations human rights treaty designed to prevent enforced disappearances, recognized under international law as a crime against humanity. The UN General Assembly adopted the convention on December 20, 2006, and it was made available for signature on February 6, 2007. It officially came into effect on December 23, 2010. By August 2024, the convention had been signed by 98 countries, with 76 of them having ratified or acceded to it.





# Taking the bull by the horn

How we fight for freedom of movement in the Sahel and Sahara  
By Moctar Dan Yayé



## Alarme Phone Sahara

AlarmePhoneSahara (APS) is a humanitarian network operating in the Sahel-Saharan region and Europe, with its main office in Agadez, Niger. It raises awareness among migrants about the dangers of desert travel and their rights, documents abuses and human rights violations along migration routes, and conducts rescue missions for migrants in distress. APS advocates for the free movement of people and denounces policies that endanger migrants' lives. The initiative is politically independent and focuses on empowering migrants to make informed choices.

Law 2015-36 was adopted in Niger under the direct influence of the European Union, because it was the bargaining chip for the Niger regime at the time at the Valletta 'horse trading' summit to capture the funds earmarked for the management or prevention of all northbound migration. This law was initially conceived as an anti-smuggling law, i.e. to combat human traffickers, but in its implementation, it criminalizes the right to mobility in Niger toward northern parts. As Niger is a major transit country in the region, linking Africa North of the Sahara with Africa South of the Sahara, many foreign nationals, generally from West Africa, but also Nigeriens, cross the country on their way North, as part of circular or seasonal migration.

Every year, many people cross the Sahara to Maghreb countries to work during the dry season and return in the rainy season, while others go to work in artisanal gold mines in the North of the country. Ignoring all this mobility, the application of law 2015-36 not only criminalized the transport of people to the north of Niger, but also many of the services associated with the journey, including facilities, accommodation and other services.

Since 2015, it has become difficult to cross Niger's borders legally or illegally. For migrants and all people on the move, the application of this law has made the journey much more expensive and much more dangerous than it used to be, because to avoid being stopped by men in uniform, transporters have to take desert roads that are often a long way from checkpoints. This led to them getting lost in the desert or abandoning their vehicles or migrants. Its implementation also means that more and more people find themselves stranded, hidden in difficult conditions in Niger's cities, notably Agadez and Niamey, for want of the means to continue their journey.

Alarme Phone Sahara, from the very inception of our initiative, combating this law was one of our main objectives, because we found this law 'depriving of liberty', it violates freedom of movement in the West African space that is ECOWAS, and it also has negative consequences on the economy and on the lives of people in this region. So after several years of denouncing and documenting the damage caused by this law, we noticed that the authorities, both national and from the West African sub-region, remained silent about the situation. So we felt that, given the seriousness of the situation, we should 'take the bull by the horns', and take legal action against the application of this law. With the support of a number of international civil society organizations, notably lawyers and other organizations in the sub-region, particularly in Mali, we worked together to gather clear evidence so that we could lodge a complaint with the sub-regional body, the ECOWAS Court of Justice.

Our expectation was that the court would call the state authorities to account for the danger posed by this law to the ambition of regional integration, and even to halt its implementation. By the same token, to call on all other countries in the sub-region that are members of ECOWAS

to face up to their responsibilities not only to protect their nationals, but also to guarantee the free movement of people and goods throughout the ECOWAS area, as stipulated in the 1979 protocol on free movement.

So our expectation was more or less an appeal to the sub-regional and national authorities to take seriously our denunciations of the misdeeds of this law. We weren't sure that the court would order the authorities to abandon the application of this law or any practice criminalizing migration, but it could nevertheless lead to a revision that would protect the rights of people on the move. Against all expectations, in July 2023 things changed abruptly in Niger, as the then Nigerien regime was overthrown by a military coup. The new authorities, in their tug-of-war with the European Union and their desire to respond to popular expectations, decided categorically to repeal law 2015-36, which they felt only served the interests of the EU.

This law was repealed by the military authorities on November 26, 2023, and all those arrested during its implementation were released. Transport activities in the region resumed as normal, without fear of being criminalized. We can see that the transport of people to the north has resumed in the official stations, and mobility people, i.e. migrants who are nationals of the ECOWAS zone, live and circulate peacefully in Niger's towns without fear of being caught by the defense and security forces. Civil society organizations such as APS, which are solidarity and support organizations for migrants in vulnerable situations, are now able to meet migrants very easily, because they are no longer hidden.

There have also been abusive pushbacks from Algeria to Niger for several years now. These pushbacks, which number in the thousands, almost 20.000 every year, consist of tracking down, arresting and rounding up





migrants, generally Sub-Saharan Africans, in camps, then loading them onto trucks and dumping them in the desert between Niger and Algeria, at a place known as Point Zero (15 km) from the first village in Niger, Assamaka, where they are forced to walk back to their villages to receive first aid. As Alarme Phone Sahara, we have been documenting and denouncing these massive pushbacks for several years, but we are also trying to bring help to these often extremely vulnerable people.

## Report Missing Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers - A Call to Clarify Their Fate

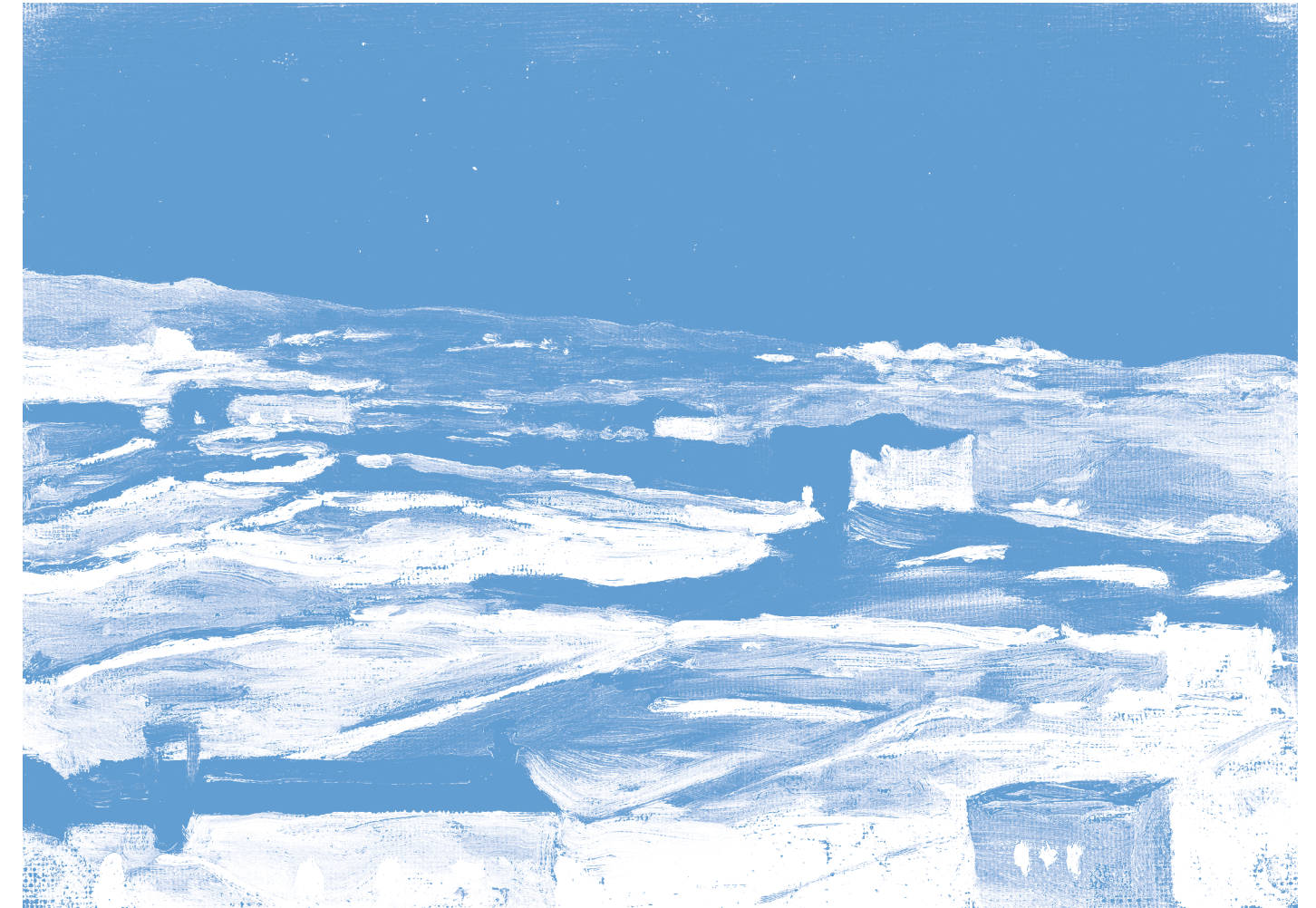
The report *Missing Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers - A Call to Clarify Their Fate* was drafted by Mr Julian Pahlke, German member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, under the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. This report sheds light on the often overlooked issue of missing migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers and stresses the need for comprehensive policy responses in Europe and globally. The report emphasises that the fate of missing persons, whether alive or deceased, can and should be clarified and that these disappearances are not inevitable but can be prevented through appropriate measures.

With the support of our partners and donations, we have been able to set up a shuttle service between Point Zero and the village of Assamaka. Whenever there's a wave of people pushed back, our motorcycle tricycles leave the village of Assamaka at Point Zero to see if there are any people who are very weak, who can't walk, and they transport them to the village. These people are often women who are pregnant or just sick, or with children. Sometimes also men who are suffering or who are also ill and can no longer continue walking.

Since the European Union and its member states lost their partner in border management or control, which is Niger, their cooperation with certain states further north, notably Tunisia and Mauritania, has increased. It's clear that people can cross the border into Niger, but unfortunately, they are still abused and mistreated, and pushed back towards the southern borders from Tunisia. A chain of 'refoulement' from Tunisia to Algeria or Libya, then from Algeria to Niger, or recently from Libya to Niger has been established.

Knowing that countries are subject to international law and regulations, i.e. to respect the prohibition on collective deportations and expulsions of people, but also to respect human dignity, thousands of African youth must not be pushed back in this way. What's more, in the course of these mass deportations, people sometimes lose their lives, or get lost in the desert. We believe that these people have been deprived of their freedoms by one or more state acts or actors. The fact that states are denying their responsibility of restricting people's freedom of movement means that the facts point to what the law calls enforced disappearance.

We are looking for support to encourage international legal bodies to conduct in-depth, serious investigations into the responsibility of states. For its credibility, international law must summon those who have disappeared as a result of forced migration, and at the very least call on states to put a stop to these acts, so that justice can prevail.



# It is just a piece of paper:

## On the legal framework on migrants' rights

In 2006, the Human Rights Council adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), marking a significant milestone in the fight against enforced disappearances. This landmark document was the culmination of years of effort by the UN Working Group and paved the way for its enforcement and the establishment of a UN Committee dedicated to this issue.

An enforced disappearance occurs when three conditions are met simultaneously: the deprivation of liberty, the involvement or acquiescence of state officials, and the denial of the deprivation itself. In essence, it can be summarised as "a secret deprivation of liberty conducted by states" (Grazyna at the Panel Discussion).

## A Worsening Crisis

Despite signalling efforts, the situation has not improved. In 2023, the UN adopted its first General Comment on Enforced Disappearances in the Context of Migration, reflecting the escalating crisis. Migratory routes have become longer and more deceitful, raising a crucial question: why do migrants take such precarious paths?

The answer lies in increasingly militarized and restrictive border policies, grounded in deterrence, discrimination, and the criminalization of migrants and those who assist them. Moreover, there is a pervasive impunity for violations of migrants' rights.

Although not all missing migrants fall under the category of enforced disappearances, the two phenomena are intricately connected, often blending into one another. Enforced disappearances of people on the move are individuals who disappear during migration or in their destination countries. These disappearances may result from abduction, detention, deportation, or the sinister dynamics of smuggling and trafficking. To escape the threat of enforced disappearance in their home countries, some are forced to undertake dangerous journeys. Acknowledging these realities, the UN Working Group adopted a comprehensive report in 2017 that explored enforced disappearances in the context of migration.

These deliberate strategies by governments obstruct migration, indirectly and directly contribute to the disappearance of countless individuals. This is a clear violation of human rights by governments.

A year after the UN General Comment, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly adopted the Report on Missing Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers. It calls for action to investigate disappearances and ensure accountability through prevention, protection, investigation, and identification efforts.

## A Paradox of Words and Actions

Yet, despite the growing body of reports, resolutions, and conventions, the situation at borders continues to deteriorate. The more the international community speaks out against these injustices, the more states find subtler ways to perpetuate human rights violations. For example, pushbacks may shift from being executed by national coast guards to being outsourced to third countries, private entities, or even militias. As the saying goes, „Every law has its loophole.“

## Beyond Words: The Power of Legal Frameworks

Legal frameworks may appear to be mere "pieces of paper", but they serve an essential purpose: recognising issues, bringing them to the forefront of public discourse, and laying the foundation for action. They shine a spotlight on violations, initiate discussions, and mobilize media and political attention. The adoption of reports such as those on missing migrants across Europe is a critical step in this process, providing structure to an otherwise fragmented discourse, and pushing the topic onto the agendas of institutions like the EU and UN. While this process may be slow and imperfect, it is necessary. Each report leads to another discussion, another resolution, and ultimately, a clearer policy direction.

This disconnect between rhetoric and action often fosters scepticism about the role of international institutions. To the average person, these entities can seem vast, abstract, and ineffective. However, when their mechanisms are explained, their value and effectiveness becomes clearer.

Civil society plays a crucial role in holding states accountable, armed with these legal tools. When activists can confront governments with tangible evidence—"You promised this, you ratified that"—they wield extraordinary power to demand action. As civil society bridges the gap with these institutions, the vague world of international law becomes more tangible, enabling us to recognize its potential.

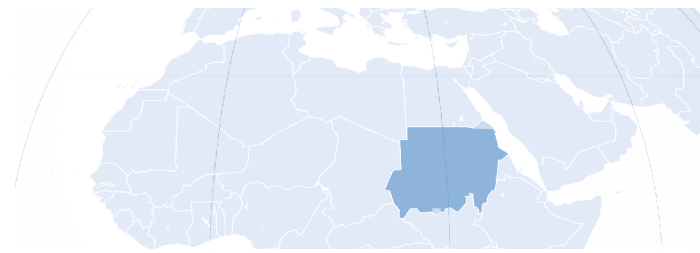
Civil society, activists, and international institutions must continue to advocate relentlessly. Every new report, discussion, or plenary session amplifies the message and strengthens the call for justice. These "pieces of paper" are not mere symbols but powerful tools. What else could be the alternative?



# Sudan: enforced disappearances as a weapon of war

Africa Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) notes an increasing number of cases of enforced disappearances since the outbreak of war on 15 April 2023.

By Asjad Alnoo



Victims of Enforced Disappearance (SGVED), founded by ACJPS and Borderline Europe, reported that a total of 1,141 people have gone missing since the outbreak of the war, including 123 women (7 minors) and 1,018 men (20 minors).

There is overwhelming evidence that the national army, particularly the Military Intelligence Service (M.I.) and the paramilitary RSF has arrested civilians throughout the country whom they suspect of supporting their opponent. The RSF is also involved in the arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance of civilians, for whose release they often demand ransom money from their families. Women and girls are abducted and sexually enslaved, trafficked to Chad and other neighbouring countries and used as labour on farms during the planting season. Refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea are also targeted by the SAF and RSF. In April 2024, the Sudanese Group for

The Sudanese legal framework includes several laws and regulations to protect against enforced disappearances, torture and other forms of inhumane treatment. For example, the Sudanese Penal Code of 1991 criminalises offences such as abduction under Article 162, unlawful detention under Articles 164 and 165, and crimes against humanity under Article 186 paragraph (n), which specifically refers to enforced disappearance. In addition, Sudan ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) in 2021. However, despite the existing legal framework, there are problems with implementation, which have

been exacerbated by the legal chaos created by the armed conflict. The immunity enjoyed by security personnel under the emergency laws has created fertile ground for them to commit offences against the civilian population without consequence.

Survivors have reported on the harsh conditions during imprisonment, such as the severe lack of food, the lack of showers during the entire period of imprisonment, and so on. Prisoners were also forced to lift heavy ammunition and food. In some cases, prisoners succumbed to their injuries during detention. On 12 January 2024, the ACJPS reported an incident in which 47 detainees who had been held by the RSF were released. The survivors testified that they were tortured during their detention by being beaten with water hoses and sticks, forced to stand in the sun for many hours, verbally abused, threatened with sexual abuse, held in poor detention rooms without ventilation and toilets, and denied meals.

Africa center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) gehört zu den ältesten Menschenrechtsorganisationen im Sudan. ACJPS hat an der Anklageschrift des ICC in Den Haag 2009 gegen El Bashir mitgearbeitet und musste dann nach Uganda ins Exil gehen. Nach der Revolution 2019 wurde ein neues Büro in Karthoum eröffnet, das wiederum mit Kriegsausbruch geschlossen werden musste.

Sudan has a long tradition of enforced disappearances. Under AlBashir, the opposition, civil society and human rights defenders were intimidated and put under pressure. With the outbreak of the war, it became a tried and tested instrument in the hands of the military government, but also the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) under General Hemedti, who had already actively trafficked slaves and mercenaries in the past. The documentation of enforced disappearances is a focus of the Africa Centre.

## Sudan: one year and a half in war

April 15, 2023, Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces militia started a conflict in Khartoum. In 18 months, that conflict has become a bloody civil war. In November 2024, 25,000 victims have been registered and over 10 million have been displaced. The war started after a long phase of political tensions between two army generals: Abdel Fattah al Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti. They were in chief of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, which should have led the Sudan to elections after the coup d'état in October 2021. The straw that broke the camel's back was Burhan's decision to integrate the RSF into the military, Hemedti was hostile to such a decision. It is a terrible war, targeting mainly civilians as figures reveal.



# Interview with Asjad Alnoo



**Q:** Sudan has a very bad reputation of disappearing political opponents, members of civil society and human rights activists. What do you do, when you hear somebody was disappeared?

**A:** As an African Centre, we cannot proceed without first verifying the information. Once the matter is confirmed, we reach out to the victim's family to validate, document, and record the information. We then seek the family's consent to file an official complaint to follow up on the case or to call for "Urgent action" of the UN CED. These steps help in documenting the case and protecting the victim, especially if it is confirmed that they are in the custody of a known entity. In such cases, the entity will not be able to subject the victim to violations associated with enforced disappearance, as they would bear legal responsibility for the act.

**A:** How do you verify cases and how do you find people?

**Q:** The African Centre relies on a network of field monitors to verify cases of enforced disappearance. Some of these monitors coordinate with emergency rooms in specific states, which document the names of victims in reports that track violations occurring in conflict zones during the war. Additionally, some information is collected from open sources, such as Facebook pages that document cases of enforced disappearance. Organizations also collaborate with the African Centre by

referring cases of enforced disappearance directly, and in some instances, families of victims reach out to the Centre themselves to report a disappearance and seek assistance. Verification of cases is a significant challenge, especially during wartime. While over a thousand cases have been documented, only 150 have been verified so far. This is because verification requires direct communication with the victims' families, adding to the complexity of the process.

**Q:** Are family members endangered when they ask about the location where their dear-ones have been brought to?

**A:** Yes, family members of victims face significant risks when asking about the whereabouts of their loved ones. In many cases, families are threatened after reporting or even discussing the disappearance. These threats often include warnings that revealing the victim's location could lead to increased torture or violations, and sometimes even death threats. For instance, recently, we encountered this challenge with four families. After collecting all the evidence regarding their loved ones' disappearance and initiating steps such as filing complaints and taking urgent actions, the families contacted us and requested that we cease all efforts. They expressed their unwillingness to discuss the matter further due to the threats they received. Such situations greatly complicate the work of the Centre and its staff, as it limits the extent of



intervention and support they can provide to victims and their families.

**Q:** Are migrants/refugees treated in a different way than Sudanese? How are they specifically affected?

**A:** Migrants and refugees in Sudan face unique challenges during the war, including heightened vulnerability to violations such as enforced disappearances. While they may not always be treated differently from Sudanese citizens in terms of exposure to general risks, their legal and social status often leaves them more isolated and with fewer avenues for protection or support. The African Centre documented two cases of enforced disappearance involving migrants during the war in Sudan. These cases highlight how migrants are particularly at risk, as they may lack family networks or local advocacy groups to follow up on their situations. Additionally, the precarious legal status of many migrants makes them hesitant to report violations, fearing deportation or further victimization. These cases have been submitted to the

United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to ensure international attention and accountability. However, addressing such issues remains challenging, as the war exacerbates migrants' marginalization and limits the effectiveness of traditional protective mechanisms.

**Q:** What is your expectation to the International bodies, and what are you risking when appealing to International bodies?

**A:** We expect from International bodies that they take decisive action to address the issue of enforced disappearances in Sudan, including putting pressure on responsible entities, advocating for the protection of victims and their families, and providing mechanisms for accountability. We also expect support in documenting cases, raising awareness globally, and ensuring that perpetrators face justice. In cases of migrants, for instance, International bodies can play a critical role in amplifying their plight, as they often lack representation or advocacy on the ground. However, appealing to international bodies comes with significant risks. Families of victims, as well as organizations like ours, often face threats from perpetrators aiming to silence them. As documented in recent cases, families are sometimes warned that any external action could worsen the victim's treatment or put their lives at greater risk. Organizations, too, risk their operations being targeted, as well as the safety of their staff. Despite these challenges, submitting cases, like the two documented migrant disappearances to the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearance, remains essential to bringing justice and ensuring the safety of those affected. While the risks are substantial, the involvement of international bodies offers a pathway to accountability and the possibility of systemic change, making the effort necessary despite their inherent dangers.

## Africa Center for Peace and Justice

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that monitors and promotes human rights and legal reform in Sudan. ACJPS was set up in 2009 after Sudanese civil society groups were expelled or suspended following the arrest of President al-Bashir. ACJPS wants to see a Sudan where everyone can live freely and prosper without fear or want in a state that is just, equal and at peace.



# International Bodies and Agencies

## Dealing with the Disappeared/ Missing Committee to protect people against enforced disappearance (Geneva)

The Committee is the body of the UN Human Rights Council that is responsible for the implementation of the Conventions UN HRC Conventions. The Committee works with the signatory states (Sudan, Niger, etc.) and intervenes in cases of violations, i.e. when people disappear in signatory states. The committee is dealing with state authorities only but invites civil society to share their expertise and contribute to their work of research for reports, country visits and gives them space to be heard on the occasion of the annual meetings .

You find on the website a form for a call for Urgent Actions. The case has to be well documented. The committee will get in contact with the authorities to find out the whereabouts of the disappeared and will advocate for release.

## Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance WGEID (Geneva)

The Working Group is the body under the UN Human Rights Council pushing for the ratification in countries who are not yet signatory. The WG is dealing also with non-state actors, and for general reports: enforced disappearance in the context of migration, elections and currently in the field of exploitation of natural resources.

With the [General comment No. 1 \(2023\) on enforced disappearance in the context of migration](#) the UN has acknowledged that push-backs can lead to enforced disappearance.

## International Commission on missing persons (Den Haag)

While the UN bodies deal with accountability for human rights violations of state actors the International Commission on missing persons is working together with state actors to find the missing, locating burial places and identifying persons who went missing as a result of conflict, human rights abuses, disasters, organized crime, migration and other circumstances.

IMCT is the expert for improving legal and technical tools for police forces, medical staff, mortuaries, forensic research and the judiciary. They are working on sites with mass graves and other sites with unidentified dead persons.

## Council of Europe: Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)

[The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) is not the European Parliament. The Council of Europe is the leading European Human Rights Organisation and the watch dog of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The Parliamentary Assembly has adopted Resolution [2569 \(2024\) Missing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – A call to clarify their fate in October 2024](#), calling for better coordination in the search of missing persons, and thus, calling for an acknowledgment of the thousands of people disappearing at the European borders.





Unterstützt durch das Forum Migration im  
Stiftungsverbund der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftungen

