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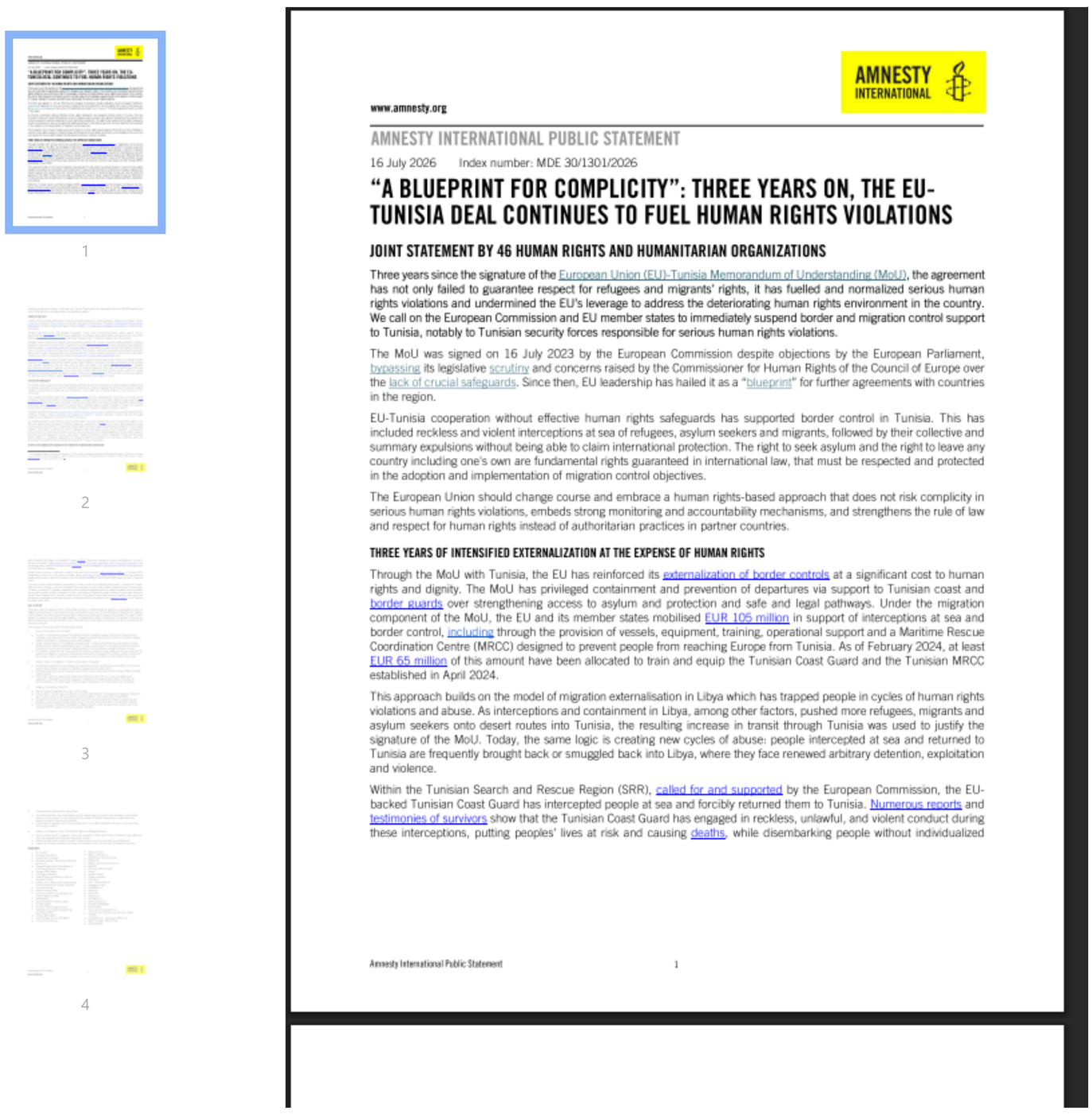
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Tunisia: “A Blueprint for Complicity”: Three years on, the EU-Tunisia deal continues to fuel human rights violations

Three years since the signature of the European Union (EU)-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the agreement has not only failed to guarantee respect for refugees and migrants’ rights, it has fuelled and normalized serious human rights violations and undermined the EU’s leverage to address the deteriorating human rights environment in the country. We call on the European Commission and EU member states to immediately suspend border and migration control support to Tunisia, notably to Tunisian security forces responsible for serious human rights violations.

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

16 July 2026 Index number: MDE 30/1301/2026

“A BLUEPRINT FOR COMPLICITY”: THREE YEARS ON, THE EU-TUNISIA DEAL CONTINUES TO FUEL HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

JOINT STATEMENT BY 46 HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Three years since the signature of the European Union (EU)-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the agreement has not only failed to guarantee respect for refugees and migrants’ rights, it has fuelled and normalized serious human rights violations and undermined the EU’s leverage to address the deteriorating human rights environment in the country. We call on the European Commission and EU member states to immediately suspend border and migration control support to Tunisia, notably to Tunisian security forces responsible for serious human rights violations.

The MoU was signed on 16 July 2023 by the European Commission despite objections by the European Parliament, bypassing its legislative scrutiny and concerns raised by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe over the lack of crucial safeguards. Since then, EU leadership has hailed it as a “blueprint” for further agreements with countries in the region.

EU-Tunisia cooperation without effective human rights safeguards has supported border control in Tunisia. This has included reckless and violent interceptions at sea of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, followed by their collective and summary expulsions without being able to claim international protection. The right to seek asylum and the right to leave any country including one’s own are fundamental rights guaranteed in international law, that must be respected and protected in the adoption and implementation of migration control objectives.

The European Union should change course and embrace a human rights-based approach that does not risk complicity in serious human rights violations, embeds strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and strengthens the rule of law and respect for human rights instead of authoritarian practices in partner countries.

THREE YEARS OF INTENSIFIED EXTERNALIZATION AT THE EXPENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Through the MoU with Tunisia, the EU has reinforced its externalization of border controls at a significant cost to human rights and dignity. The MoU has privileged containment and prevention of departures via support to Tunisian coast and border guards over strengthening access to asylum and protection and safe and legal pathways. Under the migration component of the MoU, the EU and its member states mobilised EUR 105 million in support of interceptions at sea and border control, including through the provision of vessels, equipment, training, operational support and a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) designed to prevent people from reaching Europe from Tunisia. As of February 2024, at least EUR 65 million of this amount have been allocated to train and equip the Tunisian Coast Guard and the Tunisian MRCC established in April 2024.

This approach builds on the model of migration externalisation in Libya which has trapped people in cycles of human rights violations and abuse. As interceptions and containment in Libya, among other factors, pushed more refugees, migrants and asylum seekers onto desert routes into Tunisia, the resulting increase in transit through Tunisia was used to justify the signature of the MoU. Today, the same logic is creating new cycles of abuse: people intercepted at sea and returned to Tunisia are frequently brought back or smuggled back into Libya, where they face renewed arbitrary detention, exploitation and violence.

Within the Tunisian Search and Rescue Region (SRR), called for and supported by the European Commission, the EU-backed Tunisian Coast Guard has intercepted people at sea and forcibly returned them to Tunisia. Numerous reports and testimonies of survivors show that the Tunisian Coast Guard has engaged in reckless, unlawful, and violent conduct during these interceptions, putting peoples’ lives at risk and causing deaths, while disembarking people without individualized

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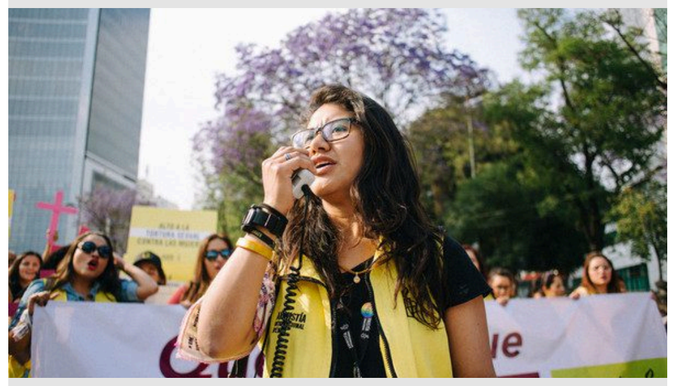
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