

Two migrants die as Morocco unleashes crackdown on behalf of Spain and the European Union

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24 August 2018

Morocco has renewed its crackdown against thousands of migrants attempting to enter Europe through Spain's north African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and by boat across the Mediterranean Sea. This comes after the European Union (EU) announced it was unlocking further funds for anti-immigrant operations in both Morocco and Tunisia.

According to the NGO Caminando Fronteras, raids by Moroccan security forces left two young people dead, one of whom, Moumoune, was just 16 years old. A video later emerged showing their beaten bodies lying on the floor handcuffed together.

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights reports that for the past two weeks raids and arrests of migrants have intensified in Moroccan cities near Ceuta and Melilla. In Nador, Moroccan police have stormed immigrant camps and apartments without court orders and bussed them south, hundreds of miles from the coast.

"This is an operation that is part of the fight against illegal immigration," said a Moroccan official, cynically claiming that those arrested had been "moved to cities where living conditions are better".

The "better" place is none other than the Sahara Desert.

At the behest of Spain and the EU, the Moroccan government is now employing the murderous policy of neighbouring Algeria, which over the past year and a half has rounded up and dumped over 13,000 refugees and migrants in the desert—where many of them have died from thirst, hunger and exposure.

The catastrophe unfolding in Morocco is a direct result of the EU's "Fortress Europe" policy and shutdown of other entry routes into Europe. According to the United Nations, more than 28,000 people have arrived in Spain from Morocco this year, close to the total for all of 2017.

The Moroccan government's brutal repression was sanctioned at the highest echelons of the EU. One of the key lobbyists for further funding for Morocco was Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE), which was brought to power with

the support of the pseudo-left Podemos party in June.

In early July, the EU approved a €55 million fund to assist Morocco and Tunisia in the crackdown. Last week, in the southern Spanish region of Andalusia, German Chancellor Angela Merkel met PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. During their meeting Merkel declared, "We have to intensify our support for Morocco and Tunisia. They are border countries, and they need our help." Sánchez said they had agreed to "intensify dialogue and cooperation with countries of origin and transit" of migrants, which can only mean further repression against migrant workers.

Two months ago, Sánchez was branded as the "humanitarian" alternative to the previous Popular Party (PP) government and far-right governments in the EU when he announced—in the immediate aftermath of his installation as prime minister—that Spain would offer safe haven to 630 migrant workers on the Aquarius rescue boat, after they had been turned away by Italy and Malta.

Podemos defended Sánchez's fraudulent symbolic gesture knowing full well the despicable anti-migrant history of the PSOE. Podemos' Congress deputy speaker, Ione Belarra, declared that the party was "satisfied" that the PSOE government had allowed Aquarius to dock, adding, "We are pleased that this government has begun to advance on the path of human rights and the guarantee of the right to asylum." She pleaded with the PSOE to realise that it "will always find us if we are talking about welcoming people who risk their lives at sea and who have the right to be saved".

No sooner had the ink dried on the Aquarius "safe harbour" authorization than the PSOE showed its true face.

Sánchez is now openly defending the summary deportation of migrants from the borders of Ceuta and Melilla—a practice condemned by the European Court of Human Rights and United Nations. Last month, migrants who scaled the razor wire fence were arrested by the Civil Guard, handcuffed and returned to Morocco without their identities being checked.

Their right to explain their personal circumstances or to receive assistance from lawyers, interpreters or medical personnel was ignored.

This policy took a new and ominous turn on Thursday with Spanish authorities carrying out an extraordinary mass expulsion of migrants, sending back 116 individuals within barely 24 hours of their managing to scale the fence separating Morocco from the Spanish enclave of Ceuta.

The operation, involving both the Civil Guard and National Police, was carried out under a 1992 bilateral accord between Spain and Morocco, which until now has been largely a dead letter because of the refusal of Moroccan authorities to observe its terms. Even Spain had previously sought to apply the accord solely to Moroccans, not to sub-Saharan Africans entering Ceuta. The Spanish Interior Ministry said Thursday that the accord has been “reactivated”, adding that it was a result of “the good relationship with Morocco in terms of immigration policy.”

The NGO Walking Frontiers denounced the action as a “collective expulsion” and “a step further in the violation of human rights” by Madrid.

The PSOE government has also defended the position of the former PP government, which appealed the European Court of Human Rights’ condemnation of Spain’s summary deportation of two migrants in 2014.

The PSOE employs the same arguments as the PP claiming that Spain’s policy is not “expulsion” but “a prevention of entry” and because the migrants “failed to overcome the police line” they had not entered “Spanish jurisdiction.”

Last week, the Sánchez government reacted to another rescue mission of 141 migrant workers by the Aquarius ship, claiming there was no longer an “emergency” and Spain was “not the safest port”. Only after negotiations with another six EU countries did Madrid say it would accept 60 people.

The PSOE government is continuing the party’s well-trodden anti-migrant policy.

It was under the PSOE government of Prime Minister Felipe González that Spain created its first migrant detention centres in 1985. Even though they became notorious for functioning as jails, where migrants are locked up in cells and subjected to mistreatment and abuse by the police, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, then a judge but now the current Interior Minister, ruled that they “do not violate human rights”.

The summary deportation policy was started under González in 1995 and reaffirmed by every government since. It was enshrined in the 2015 Citizens Security Law by the PP government. The PSOE then posed as an opponent, with former spokeswomen Soraya Rodríguez pontificating that the PP government “stop the deportations to Morocco,

because they are illegal and cannot be kept up.”

The original border fence erected around Melilla and Ceuta was built by the PSOE government of José Luis Zapatero in 2005. It consisted of 11 kilometres of parallel three-metre high fences with razor-wire, regular watch posts, CCTV, spotlights, noise and movement sensors and a road running between them for police patrols. Over the years it has been increased to six metres, with satellites and unmanned drones introduced.

The anti-migrant policies of the ruling class do not have popular support. Last year, hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets of Barcelona in opposition to the PP government under the slogan, “No more deaths, open the borders.” It was the largest rally held in Europe so far in defence of refugees and open borders.

A recent case reported by *eldiario.org* gives a glimpse of the huge sympathy that exists towards African migrants.

Journalist Violeta Muñoz was enjoying the beach in Andalusia when she witnessed around 50 migrants arriving in a boat after the perilous crossing across the Mediterranean. People cheered them saying “bravo, you are so brave” and gave them drinks. They explained to the migrants as best they could in Spanish and in sign language how to leave the beach without being caught by the police.

When the police arrived and arrested them, people screamed at them, “I would be so ashamed”, “They have done nothing, leave them be”, “The ones you have to get are those selling drugs”. Others yelled “but they are only children”. A woman said “shame, shame, have they done something wrong? I hope you cannot sleep peacefully”.

Such a scene epitomizes the gulf that exists between the ruling class establishment, including the PSOE and Podemos, and the majority of the population, who are opposed to the attacks on democratic rights, austerity, war and militarism. It underscores above all that there can be no real defence of immigrants outside of an international, socialist movement of the working class against war and police state rule.



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