

To: Member and observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council

June 2023

Re: The UN Human Rights Council should urgently respond to the global pattern of deaths, torture and other grave human rights violations at international borders

Dear Excellencies,

The undersigned civil society organizations and groups write to express our deep concern about policies and practices of migration governance that lead to deaths, torture and other grave human rights violations at and around international borders and to call on the Human Rights Council to take appropriate action by establishing an independent international monitoring mechanism to investigate these violations including root causes of violations in the governance of international migration, and contribute to accountability and redress for victims and their families.

The Missing Migrants Project recorded 55,980 reported deaths of people in migration worldwide from 2014 to May 2023. This number is widely understood to be a significant underestimate. In some regions migrant deaths have reached record highs. These deaths are often not effectively investigated.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants has repeatedly raised serious concerns about abusive and violent border governance tactics, which include state of emergency measures, the legitimization of pushback and pullback practices through the introduction of legislation and government executive orders, inadequate State-led search and rescue operations and obstacles imposed on non-State search and rescue operators.

As further noted by the former UN Special Rapporteur on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, many of the migration policies that contribute to deaths and other grave violations of refugee and migrant rights disproportionately affect individuals from certain national origin, ethnic, racial and religious groups. In many cases these policies involve or are built on structural racism.

The widespread practices of externalization of migration controls by predominantly wealthy countries, who seek to pressure and partner with countries of origin and transit to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from leaving their territories and reaching their borders, also significantly contribute to deaths, torture and other serious violations, particularly against

individuals/people of certain national origins, ethnicity, race or religion obstructing their right to leave and to seek asylum through safe routes and forcing people into dangerous journeys.

The report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants on the human rights impact of pushbacks of migrants on land and at sea ([A/HRC/47/30](#)) documents a deeply concerning global pattern of routine human rights violations at international borders concluding:

The practice of “pushbacks” is widespread and exists along most migration routes. Pushbacks manifest an entrenched prejudice against migrants and demonstrate a denial of States’ international obligations to protect the human rights of migrants at international borders.[1]

The depth of concern and worsening situation following this report led the Special Rapporteur to follow up with a report on human rights violations at international borders: trends, prevention and accountability ([A/HRC/50/31](#)), in which they concluded:

that pushbacks remain de facto general policy in many States and continue to seriously impede the enjoyment of the human rights of migrants who cross international borders. The full spectrum of such violations often remains hidden, due to State-led attempts to dismiss or cover up allegations of wrongdoing.[2]

Both reports echo the pattern of human rights violations at international borders that the previous High Commissioners repeatedly drew the Human Rights Council’s attention to. In September 2019 the then High Commissioner used the phrase “lethal disregard” to describe the use of policies and practices that systematically put people’s lives and wellbeing at risk, including children. The work of the Special Rapporteur, the High Commissioner and their Office, and many of the undersigned civil society organizations and groups show that this pattern of violations and abuses is not limited to one corridor or region.

The serious, systematic and widespread nature of human rights violations and abuses at and around international borders has been reported to the Human Rights Council on multiple occasions in [the reports of the Special Rapporteur](#) and has prompted several other Special Procedures to focus reports on migration, including the [Special Rapporteur on torture](#), the [Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders \(twice\)](#), the [Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity](#), the [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#), and the [Working Group on the use of mercenaries](#). Despite this, grave human rights violations persist unabated and with impunity.

The Human Rights Council has acknowledged guidance from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights including [Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders](#) and [the Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights of Migrants in Vulnerable Situations](#). The Human Rights Council has adopted a [Presidential Statement on protection at sea](#) (2014) and resolutions on [migrants in transit](#) (2015), [migrants and refugees in large movements](#) (2016) and [situations of vulnerability](#) (2021). The Council also called upon States to “[ensure accountability and reparations for human rights violations at borders and to](#)

[adopt a racial justice approach, including by adopting policies to address structural racism in the management of international migration flows](#)” (2022).

Despite this, grave human rights violations persist unabated and with impunity.

A new and stronger response drawing on and complementing the work of the Special Rapporteur is needed.

In light of the scale, severity, and global nature of this failure to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all regardless of migration status, we call on your governments to ensure an appropriate response from the Human Rights Council by establishing an independent international monitoring mechanism to undertake a global investigation into deaths, enforced disappearances, torture and other grave human rights violations faced by people in transit across international borders including as a result of pushbacks and collective expulsions, and to contribute to accountability and redress for victims and their families.

This independent monitoring mechanism would contribute to prevention and accountability by reporting on its findings and providing recommendations on robust follow up action at national, regional and international levels including addressing root causes of violations and the role of racial discrimination in the management of international migration, to ensure remedy for victims and to end these practices and the climate of impunity surrounding grave human rights violations at borders and in transit.

Sincerely,

1. #MeRepresenta
2. ACCSS
3. aditus foundation
4. African Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders
5. AfroDiccionario
6. Agenzia Scalabriniana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (ASCS)
7. Albergue Decanal Guadalupano
8. Àltera
9. AMMPO
10. Amnesty International
11. AMUMRA Asociacion Civil de Derechos Humanos Mujeres Unidas Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina
12. APDHA Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía
13. Apna Haq
14. Arizona Palestine Solidarity Alliance
15. ARSIS-Association for the Social Support of Youth
16. Asamblea Abierta de Migrantes y Promigrantes de TARAPACA
17. ASGI (Associazione Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione)

18. Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)
19. Asociación de Familiares de Migrantes Desaparecidos de Guatemala
20. Asociación Pop No'j
21. Asociación Tierramatria
22. Asociación Valiente Bangla
23. Association of Domestic workers (ADW)
24. Asylum Access México (AAMX) A.C.
25. Babel Cay Centre, Athens - GR
26. BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
27. Bloque Latinoamericano de Migración
28. Bondeko Refugee Livelihoods Centre
29. BORDE
30. Border Violence Monitoring Network
31. Borderline Europe
32. Bridge EU
33. Bundesweiter Koordinierungskreis gegen Menschenhandel e.V.
34. Buscando Desaparecidos México BUSCAME
35. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
36. Care4Calais
37. CAREF - Comision Argentina para refugiados y migrantes
38. Casa Arcoíris, Albergue Temporal
39. Casa de Atención a Desamparados, AC
40. CCAMYN Centro Comunitario de Atención al Migrante y Necesitado
41. Center for Conflict Management, Almaty
42. Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA)
43. Center for legal aid - Voice in Bulgaria
44. Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)
45. Centre for Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa
46. Centro de Atención a la Familia Migrante Indígena (CAFAMI)
47. Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte
48. Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo SJ" (CSMM)
49. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
50. Centro de Justicia para la Paz y el Desarrollo A.C (CEPAD)
51. Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social A.C
52. Child Circle
53. Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)
54. Civil Society Action Committee
55. Climate Refugees
56. CNCD-11.11.11
57. Coalición de Derechos Humanos
58. Colectivo Buscadoras Guanajuato
59. Colectivo Contra la Tortura y la Impunidad
60. Comision de Accion Social Menonita CASM
61. Comisión Internacional Coordinadora Nacional Inmigrantes Chile

62. Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos A.C.  
(CMDPDH)
63. Comité de Derechos Humanos de Nuevo Laredo AC
64. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
65. CompassCollective (Grenzenlos - People in Motion e.V.)
66. Con Amor y Esperanza Hasta Encontrarles Puebla
67. Conectas Direitos Humanos
68. CONFER
69. Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES)
70. CONVIVE - Fundación Cepaim
71. Corporación Colectivo sin Fronteras - Chile
72. Corporación mujeres Afrodiaspóricas
73. CUT CHILE
74. Cyprus Refugee Council
75. Defence for Children International Greece
76. Dejusticia
77. Denise Nuño Lara
78. Domestic Caretakers Union in Taiwan
79. Educación contra el racismo A.C.
80. Emergency ONG Onlus
81. End Streamline Coalition
82. Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP)
83. Equipo del Decenio Afrodescendiente - España
84. EuroMed Rights
85. European Network Against Racism
86. European Sex Workers Rights Alliance (ESWA)
87. Familias de Acapulco en busca de sus desaparecidos A.C
88. Fe y Alegría Venezuela
89. Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI)
90. Forced To Flee
91. Franciscan Network for Migrants - USA
92. Franciscans International
93. Frente Nacional de Inmigrantes
94. Frontera con Justicia AC [Casa del Migrante Saltillo]
95. Fundación Alboan
96. Fundación Construir
97. Fundación Emet
98. Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho (FJEDD)
99. GISTI (Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigré-es)
100. Global Alliance against Traffic in Women
101. Global Migrant Workers Network
102. Global Migration Policy Associates (GMPA)
103. Grans Projectes Solidaris (GPS)
104. Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)

105. Greek Forum of Refugees
106. Groundation
107. Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
108. Hermanas de San José de Lyon
109. HIAS
110. Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions
111. Huellas Ancestrales
112. Human Rights Watch
113. I Have Rights.
114. ÌHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation.
115. INQUEST
116. Instituto de Asuntos Culturales, España (IACE)
117. Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas
118. Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, AC.
119. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
120. International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)
121. International Commission of Jurists
122. International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
123. International Detention Coalition (IDC)
124. International Domestic Workers Federation
125. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
126. International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)
127. International Fellowship of Reconciliation
128. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
129. INTERSOS
130. Irídia – Center for the defense of Human Rights
131. Irídia-Centro para la Defensa de Derechos Humanos
132. Ivorian Community of Greece
133. Jesuit Refugee Service
134. Jesuit Refugee Service, Ecuador
135. JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) Belgium
136. JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) Portugal
137. Junax Ko'tantik
138. Justicia y dignidad Cordoba-Orizaba
139. Justicia y dignidad Veracruz
140. Kanlungan Filipino Consortium
141. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
142. KISA - Equality, Support, Antiracism
143. La Cimade
144. Latinas en Poder
145. Legal Center Lesvos
146. Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme
147. Ligue des droits de l'Homme (LDH)
148. Louise Michel

149. Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
150. Magistrada Ya
151. Mesa Nacional para las Migraciones en Guatemala (MENAMIG)
152. Mexiro A.C.
153. Migrant Voice
154. Migrant Women Association Malta
155. Migrants' Rights Network
156. Migration Youth & Children Platform
157. Migreurop
158. Minority Rights Group International (MRG)
159. MIREDES Internacional
160. Mixed Migration Centre
161. Mobile Info Team
162. Modeteab
163. Move Coalition
164. Movimiento Socio Cultural de trabajadores haitianos' (MOSCTHA)
165. National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
166. National Domestic Women's Workers Union
167. National Federation of Technical and Industrial Workers (Bangladesh)
168. National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
169. Observatorio Ciudadano
170. Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano de Seguridad, Justicia y Legalidad (ONC)
171. OCDIH
172. ONG Jeunesse-Enfance-Migration-Developpement (JMED)
173. ONG Marq'ay
174. Oxfam México
175. PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants)
176. Politics4Her
177. Poverty Elimination and Community Education (PEACE) Foundation
178. PROTECT Union
179. Public Services International
180. Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network - QARN
181. Quaker Council for European Affairs
182. Quaker United Nations Office
183. Quakers in Britain
184. r42-SailAndRescue
185. Rastreadoras por La Paz de Sinaloa
186. Red Franciscana para Migrantes
187. Red Franciscana para Migrantes, Colombia
188. Red Jesuíta con Migrantes - Latinoamérica y el Caribe (RJM-LAC)
189. Red Nacional de Organizaciones Migrantes y promigrantes de Chile
190. Rede de Mulheres Negras de Pernambuco
191. Refugee Council of Australia
192. Refugee Legal Support

193. Refugee Social Services
194. Refugee Welfare Association of Cameroon (REWAC)
195. Refugees in Libya
196. Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT)
197. Réseau Migration Développement Droits Humains (REMIDDH)
198. ResqShip
199. Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN)
200. Sdružení pro integraci a migraci / Association for Integracion and Migration
201. Sea-Watch
202. Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, Argentina-Uruguay
203. Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados - Oficina Regional Latinoamérica y el Caribe
204. Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados (JRS) México
205. Sexual Rights Initiative
206. Sin Fronteras IAP
207. Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon - Maine
208. SOS Humanity
209. Soy Mireya Peart. De scuetdo con la propuesta
210. SplitSeed Productions
211. Stichting LOS
212. Stolen Dreams
213. Terre des Hommes International Federation
214. The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem
215. The Inter African Committee in Norway (IAC Norway)
216. The International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
217. The Legal Resources Centre
218. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
219. Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University
220. Uniendo Cristales A.C.
221. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
222. United Domestic Workers of the Philippines (UNITED)
223. Universidad de la Tierra en Puebla, AC
224. Voces Mesoamericanas, Acción con Pueblos Migrantes A.C.
225. Volunteers for Prison Inmates (VPI) Cameroon
226. Women in Migration Network (WIMN)
227. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
228. World Uyghur Congress

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[1] Report on means to address the human rights impact of pushbacks of migrants on land and at sea - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, A/HRC/47/30, Summary

[2] Human rights violations at international borders: trends, prevention and accountability - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants A/HRC/50/31, para. 70