



END THE MANUFACTURED HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

A Manifesto
by SOS MEDITERRANEE

Illustration: Théo Garnier-Greuez

For ten years, SOS MEDITERRANEE has sailed the Central Mediterranean, one of the deadliest maritime migration routes in the world. From 2016 to end of 2025, our crews aboard the Aquarius and the Ocean Viking have assisted more than 42,700 people in 453 operations. Each rescue is a deliberate choice to uphold humanity and maritime law in a context where death at sea has been allowed to become routine. The tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean is neither accidental nor inevitable, but the foreseeable consequence of political decisions that have replaced assistance with deterrence.

Over the past decade, SOS MEDITERRANEE has witnessed **the systematic erosion of the duty to rescue**. State-led search and rescue has been dismantled, proactive assistance withdrawn, and coordination hollowed out. Distress alerts are often left unanswered, rescues are routinely delayed or obstructed, and survivors are left adrift. This is not a failure of capacity, but a failure of political will.

At the same time, **the delegation of search and rescue coordination to Libya**, despite overwhelming evidence of arbitrary detention, widespread violence, torture, forced labour, and exploitation, has institutionalised forced returns as a tool of migration control. Through financial and technical support, European governments have enabled a system in which people rescued at sea are returned to harm, in open defiance of international maritime and human rights law. Every interception leading to Libya deepens Europe's complicity in a cycle of abuse.

As States withdrew from rescue, civil search and rescue organisations stepped in to fill the void. Over the years, cooperation at sea has been re-

placed by confrontation. Administrative hurdles, vessel detentions, denied disembarkations, and the systematic assignment of distant ports have become tools to reduce the presence of independent witnesses and life-saving capacity in the Central Mediterranean.

For SOS MEDITERRANEE, the cost has been immense. **Over the past decade, we have lost 591 operational days, over one year and seven months during which our vessels could have been saving lives. Yet the human cost of these policies is far greater.** Since 2014, more than 26,000 people have died or gone missing in the Central Mediterranean alone. This reflects a system that discourages movement rather than safeguarding people at sea.

International maritime law is clear: States have a duty to render assistance to persons in distress, coordinate rescue, and to ensure prompt disembarkation in a place of safety. The means to uphold these obligations exist. What is missing is the decision to place human life at the centre of policy.

Ten years after the creation of our association, we continue to call the European Union and coastal states to:

- Re-establish state-led, proactive search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean
- End the delegation of rescue responsibilities to unsafe third countries
- Protect the humanitarian space at sea and end obstruction of NGO-led search and rescue
- Ensure transparency and accountability for failures to rescue and violations at sea

Ten years on, we are still here, because we refuse to accept a maritime space where deaths are tolerated, responsibility is evaded, and silence is imposed.

Still here to rescue people in distress at sea and disembark them in a place of safety;

Still here to uphold the universal values of humanity and to protect survivors' dignity;

Still here, refusing to look away from what happens at sea and bearing witness to violations of maritime and human rights law.

Faced with the unacceptable, we are still here. Stand with us to defend humanity at sea.



10 YEARS
SOS
MEDITERRANEE
STILL
HERE!

www.sosmediterranee.org
#10YearsStillHere