**Statement on the notion of short-term enforced disappearance at the Nigerien-Algerian Border by Alarme Phone Sahara**

Deportations from Algeria to Niger have been happening on a large scale for a couple of years.

Already in 2022, at least 24,250 people have been deported to the Nigerian village Assamaka at the Nigerien-Algerian border. According to our observations, 19,688 people were deported from Algeria to Niger between 1st January 2023 and 16th July 2023. This is almost the same number of people as they were deported over a whole year in recent years!

Assamaka is a village in the middle of the Sahara, in northern Niger, 15 kilometers from the Niger-Algeria border. Normally, 1500 people live in Assamaka, but currently there are at least four times that number. The backdrop are the mass deportations of undocumented migrants from Algeria. The deportees are women, including pregnant women, children and minors, as well as men, who have made an often torturous journey through the desert in buses and trucks. Many have been systematically beaten, abused and robbed by Algerian security forces.

The deportation transports to the Algerian-Nigerian no man's land can be divided into two groups: In the so-called "official" transports, one finds mainly Nigerien citizens. On the basis of an agreement between Niger and Algeria, they are taken directly to Assamaka, where they are then transported by the Nigerien authorities to Arlit or Agadez. On the other hand, the so-called "unofficial" transports mainly concern people from West and Central Africa, but also from Arab or Asian countries. They are left at “point zero“, at the Algeria-Niger border, and have to walk 15 kilometers to Assamaka. With this practice, Algerian security forces always put the lives of deportees at risk and it is feared that many more will not make it if they get lost in the desert.

The people who are deported from Algeria to Niger or the Niger border were mostly picked up in raids in Algerian cities, where the police act with great arbitrariness. They are taken to detention centres where, according to witness reports, violent abuse is common and their personal belongings, such as mobile phones and cash, are taken from them. From there, they are finally loaded onto deportation convoys that take them first by bus to Tamanrasset in the south of the country and from there by trucks to the Niger border.

These circumstances suggest that there is no real chance for those affected in Algeria to appeal, consult legal counsel or make friends and relatives aware of their situation, so it is difficult to understand how many people are actually detained for the purpose of deportation.

The fact that some of the deportation convoys are carried out unofficially and without consultation with the Nigerien authorities further exacerbates the danger that deported people suffer arbitrariness and violence at the hands of the Algerian police and gendarmerie or may disappear without clarification of their whereabouts.

**Danger of deportees getting lost**

Most of the time, the deportees are shooed out of the trucks early in the morning in the middle of the desert at the "point zero" by Algerian authorities. It is not uncommon for the state forces to shoot guns in the air to scare the migrants away. These are people who have already spent days in prisons and have endured a gruesome journey of hours in the truck. In the desert, it is difficult for people to find their way around, especially people who do not come from such regions. The danger of people getting lost is a given and is reported again and again by fellow campaigners on the ground.

**The year 2021, also marked by thousands of deportations from Algeria to Niger every month, ended with the tragic death of a Sudanese citizen who died at "point zero" in the desert area of the Algerian-Nigerian border near the town of Assamaka. According to the whistleblowers of Alarme Phone Sahara, the deceased had arrived at "point zero" on 8th of December with an unofficial deportation convoy.** The exact identity and circumstances of the Sudanese man's death have yet to be clarified. However, it can be assumed that the inhumane and violent conditions in which arrested migrants are detained in Algerian prisons, transported over long distances across the desert to the Nigerian border and finally abandoned in the middle of the desert in a starved and dehydrated state, are directly responsible for the man's death

But even before arriving in Niger, individuals may be lost, either deciding to jump out of the moving truck or falling out of the truck due to being crammed together. It has been reported that there are people who risk to die and jump out of the truck in order to flee from the deportation convoy, search their own way and maybe continue their migration project. There is also a risk of people disappearing in the short term.

It is striking that in several cases the number of deported people registered by the Nigerien police authorities upon arrival in Assamaka was significantly lower than the reported number of those who were previously transported with the deportation convoy.

On the one hand, this may be due to the fact that some flee from the deportation convoy before arrival and others deliberately evade registration by the authorities. However, it is also to be feared that some of the persons in question may be in danger of dying in the desert or, in the worst case, die without this being recorded anywhere.

**Support by Alarme Phone Sahara**

To assist people deported with convoys from Algeria arriving in Assamaka at the Algerian-Nigerian border, Alarme Phone Sahara (APS) has purchased two tricycle tuctuc vehicles that are used for different situations of need or distress.

**Rescuing people left in the desert**

People deported by Algerian forces in "unofficial" convoys, mostly not Nigeriens, but nationals of other countries, are always dropped off at "Point Zero" in the border area between Algeria and Niger, in the middle of the desert. People have to walk between 15 and 20 kilometers through the desert to reach Assamaka, the first Nigerien town after the Algerian border.

During this walk, some people get lost in the desert, especially when they arrive at night and lose their orientation. In addition, many deportees arrive injured and ill after being mistreated by Algerian security forces and after spending several days crossing the desert on the platform of a truck. The sick and injured, in particular, often no longer have the strength to walk from "Point Zero" to Assamaka.

The APS team in Assamaka has set itself the task of rescuing people with the tricycle vehicle who have been deported and who have got lost on the way from "Point Zero" to Assamaka or who have been left behind.

**Transporting sick and injured people**

On site in Assamaka, the tricycle is also used to provide practical support to the deportees, including transporting injured and sick people to the local health sector as quickly and easily as possible.

The first use of the new vehicle took place on 29th of July 2022, when a group of deportees from an unofficial convoy arrived in Assamaka on foot. A man with head and leg injuries who was limping as a result of ill-treatment by Algerian security forces was taken from the local police station to the clinic.

**Humanitarian Crisis in Assamaka**

In the face of these mass deportations, a humanitarian crisis is occurring in the border village of Assamaka, aggravated day by day by the fact that, since December 2022, the reception center of the IOM (International Organization for Migration) in Assamaka no longer registers new deportees. For the thousands of people deported by unofficial convoys after the closure, no means of travel is being made available to leave Assamaka, either by IOM or the Nigerien state. Only a few manage to organise a vehicle with money from relatives. All the others remain in Assamaka, without shelters, blankets and mats, without provision of food and water.

This situation not only endangers the safety of the deportees, but also of the local population: because the deportees find themselves forced to beg from the local population, some also steal and slaughter animals to feed themselves. This leads to additional tensions and conflicts and increasingly endangers general security. The local police have therefore imposed a curfew, that prohibits the deported people from moving around the village after 9pm, making their situation even more precarious.

**The current humanitarian crisis in Assamaka is a direct result of the ongoing mass deportations of migrants from Algeria - facilitated by the EU - and the termination of services previously provided by IOM in Assamaka. Alarme Phone Sahara therefore calls for an immediate halt to the deportations. This also implies that the Nigerien state renounces its deportation agreements with Algeria. Furthermore, Alarme Phone Sahara calls on the UN rapporteur on migration to assume his responsibility and put pressure on Algeria to respect its international commitment to human rights agreements.**

**An immediate response to the humanitarian crisis in Assamaka is equally important. As Alarme Phone Sahara we demand that the Nigerien state, in collaboration with the international community and national and international organisations, take protective measures for migrants and people who are stranded in Assamaka as quickly as possible.**

Apart from the aid organisation Doctors without Borders (MSF), which continues to provide health support, Alarme Phone Sahara was at the beginning of 2023 the only human rights organisation that is continuously on the ground in Assamaka and offers practical support to deportees. Faced with this humanitarian crisis, [Alarme Phone Sahara has issued an alert](https://alarmephonesahara.info/en/blog/posts/urgent-appeal-humanitarian-crisis-in-assamaka-on-the-niger-algeria-border-thousands-of-people-deported-from-algeria-in-vulnerable-conditions-and-left-on-their-own-in-the-middle-of-the-sahara-without-shelter-and-care). Similarly, [Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) has drawn attention to the alarming situation](https://www.msf.org/niger-msf-denounces-appalling-conditions-migrants-abandoned-assamaka). Afterwards, we observed that various institutions on the side of the Nigerien state have recognised the urgency of the humanitarian crisis in Assamaka and have started to take practical measures. The EU has decided to provide considerable amounts of money via its [”European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations” (ECHO) and humanitarian NGOs, like COOPI from Italy, as well as civil society organisations from Niger, have gone to Assamaka to set up immediate aid structures.](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

Somehow, according to Alarme Phone Sahara's observations, there has not been sufficient substantial improvement in the situation of deportees stranded in Assamaka so far. In particular, deportees have protested against the behaviour of the IOM, which continues to take in only those who have so far been accommodated in its camp, where space is limited. Meanwhile, others are accommodated in emergency shelters set up by COOPI, others are staying in improvised shelters in the grounds of the Doctors Without Borders infirmary and, according to latest reports, hundreds of people in Assamaka were still completely on their own on the streets.

**Official deportation agreement between Algeria and Niger**

Official deportations from Algeria to Niger take place on the basis of a bilateral agreement signed in 2014 for the deportation of Niger nationals, many of whom live in Algeria in a context of often seasonal migration. However, the Algerian state also takes advantage of this to deport numerous nationals from other countries, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa, in "unofficial" convoys, and so far the Niger authorities lack the power or the will to stop this practice.

The deportations from Algeria to Niger and the human rights violations by Algerian security forces should also be seen in the context of the policy of externalisation of borders by EU countries, which have agreements with Niger to help close migration routes and which also collaborate with Algeria, among other things in the form of the delivery of large capacities of military vehicles and "security" technology.