

## In Calais, Abdulfatah Hamdallah was the latest victim of European migration policies

On Wednesday 19 August, Abdulfatah Hamdallah, a Sudanese refugee from western Kordofan, was found dead on a beach in Sangatte, in Pas-de-Calais, after trying to cross the strait that separates the United Kingdom from France aboard a makeshift boat.<sup>1</sup>

One more death.

Abdulfatah Hamdallah is not the first person who has died trying to reach England. In Calais, like elsewhere in the European Union and at its gates,<sup>2</sup> men, women and children are dying trying to cross borders in the hope of escaping from war, persecution and misery – or merely of finding a better life elsewhere.

Local activists in Calais estimate that since 1999 at least 275 people have died at this border area: died from drowning as they attempt to cross the Channel or to board a ferry in the port of Calais, crashed under the load of a truck in which they had hidden, electrocuted by Eurostar's overhead lines or, simply, died from lack of access to healthcare or reception facilities.<sup>3</sup>

Marlène Schiappa, French Minister Delegate in charge of citizenship, considered it appropriate to react on social networks, where she tweeted: "This unbearable drama is mobilising us even + [i.e. 'more'] with @GDarmanin to act against the smugglers who take advantage of the distress of human beings!"<sup>4</sup> The British Home Secretary, Piri Patel, followed suit, saying: "This is an upsetting and tragic loss of a young life. This horrendous incident serves as a brutal reminder of the abhorrent criminal gangs and people smugglers who exploit vulnerable people. Working together we are determined to stop them".<sup>5</sup>

Two birds with one stone. In unison, the British and French governments are using the same arguments. Not only are they clearing themselves of any responsibility for the death of Abdulfatah Hamdallah, but they are once again pointing to the figure of the "smuggler" as the sole culprit of these "immigration tragedies".

It would however be important to recall some obvious facts. "Smugglers" and "abhorrent criminal gangs" only exist because displaced people, fleeing wars and authoritarian powers, economic and ecological crises, are deprived of their freedom of movement. For nearly 30 years, the EU and its member states have done anything in their power to push further away these "undesirables" in search of protection. What is happening in the Strait of Pas-de-Calais is just a grim reproduction of situations in the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea.

The Franco-British border is therefore no exception. A succession of texts and bilateral agreements<sup>6</sup> have transformed this cross-border area into a fortified zone, ever more controlled, always creating further obstacles to desperate attempts at crossing by displaced people. Following the erection of barriers at the port and on its

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/aug/20/drowned-sudanese-teenager-identified-as-abdulfatah-hamdallah-wajdi>

<sup>2</sup> <https://analytics.huma-num.fr/Nicolas.Lambert/theborderkills/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gisti.org/spip.php?article5426> ; <http://timeglider.com/timeline/65ecd96fa599a9c6> ; <https://neocarto.github.io/calais/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/MarleneSchiappa/status/1296006599090343936?s=20>

<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/pritipatel/status/1296024306946920449?s=20>

<sup>6</sup> From the Schengen protocol (1991) to the Touquet agreement (2003) and the Sandhurst treaty (2018).

bypass in 2014,<sup>7</sup> the Eurotunnel site was fortified in 2015<sup>8</sup> and a “green wall” intended to prevent any attempted intrusion on the port bypass was built. In recent days, faced with the arrival of several boats from the French coasts, the British authorities have proven yet more inventive in making this border-crossing “impracticable”, in the words of the British Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> They even considered deploying navy ships, drones and planes.

Violent deterrence as the only political strategy. For the exiled people stranded in Calais, the situation has turned into a daily hell<sup>10</sup> where they are subjected to undignified living conditions and to regular intimidation and police violence.<sup>11</sup>

The death of Abdulfatah Hamdallah, like all the others, are not “human tragedies” caused by “abhorrent criminal gangs and smugglers”. They are the consequence of the deadly migration policies of the EU and its member states, which leave exiles with no alternative to taking disproportionate risks in order to seek protection or a better future, which neither their country nor Europe is willing to give them.

### **Signatories**

Actes & Cités

ADRA France – Antenne de Dunkerque

L'Auberge des Migrants

Association ACCMV (Grande-Synthe)

Cimade Nord Picardie

Gisti

Human Rights Observers

Migraction59, Plateforme d'hébergement citoyen

Migreurop

MRAP - Littoral dunkerquois

Oxford Against Immigration Detention

Salam Nord Pas-de-Calais

Solidarity Border

Statewatch

Terre d'errance – Norrent-Fontes

---

<sup>7</sup> The barriers inside the port site were doubled; a double fence was erected over a distance of two kilometres along the bypass leading to the port area - the first fence reached four meters high and the other, a little less than three meters, was equipped with a curved access ramp in order to prevent people from hanging onto it, and was topped with barbed wire. Between the two fences, an infrared detection space was installed.

<sup>8</sup> 29 km of barriers were erected to “secure” the site, around one hundred wooded hectares are levelled, and Eurotunnel acquires drones to facilitate the detection of “intruders”.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/26544/face-a-l-afflux-de-migrants-londres-veut-rendre-impraticable-la-traversee-de-la-manche>

<sup>10</sup> [L'Humanité, 11 août 2020, « Calais : l'État aggrave la situation des exilés »](#)

<sup>11</sup> [www.ouest-france.fr/monde/migrants/migrants-des-associations-de-calais-saisissent-la-defenseure-des-droits-et-des-rapporteurs-de-l-onu-6937608](http://www.ouest-france.fr/monde/migrants/migrants-des-associations-de-calais-saisissent-la-defenseure-des-droits-et-des-rapporteurs-de-l-onu-6937608), Migrants. Associations in Calais seized the Defender of Rights and UN rapporteurs - 13 Calais-based organisations providing support to migrants seized the Defender of Rights and UN rapporteurs on Friday 14 August to “denounce the recurring abuses committed by public authorities”.