

# Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch expose Greece's lies over drowning of 600 migrants on the *Adriana*

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18 December 2023

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have confirmed that Greece was directly responsible for the sinking of the *Adriana* fishing vessel and drowning of more than 600 migrants.

On June 14, the *Adriana* sank off Greece's port of Pylos. The disaster was one of the largest losses of life in a single event ever recorded and shocked the world, adding to the 20,000-plus drowned in the Mediterranean over the last two decades.

The mass murder of refugees was the result of brutal "pushback" policies designed to prevent desperate refugees and asylum seekers from entering "Fortress Europe." Last week marked the passing of six months without anyone being brought to justice for this heinous crime.

Meticulous research and investigations by the German regional broadcaster NDR, the *Guardian*, the research agency Forensis and the Greek organization Solomon concluded that the *Adriana* was towed by the Hellenic Coast Guard towards Italian waters, leading to the boat capsizing.

This body of evidence is substantiated by the nearly 4,000-word Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch report, "Greece: 6 Months On, No Justice for Pylos Shipwreck."

It explains "The *Adriana*, a severely overcrowded fishing trawler, capsized in the early morning of June 14, 2023, leading to the death of more than 600 people. It had started its journey from Libya five days earlier with an estimated 750 migrants and asylum seekers, including children, mainly from Syria, Pakistan, and Egypt. Only 104 of those onboard survived and 82 bodies were recovered."

The human rights organisations "interviewed 21 survivors, 5 relatives of 5 people still missing, and representatives of the Hellenic Coast Guard, the Greek police, nongovernmental organizations, United Nations and international agencies and organizations."

They found that "in the 15 hours between receiving the first alert that the *Adriana* was in their [Greece's] search and rescue region, and when it capsized, Greek authorities failed to mobilize appropriate resources for a rescue."

The report states, "The authorities were clearly aware of indicators of distress, such as overcrowding and insufficient food and water, on the *Adriana* and, survivors said, knew about corpses on board and requests for rescue..."

"Survivors said that a Coast Guard patrol boat attached a rope to

the *Adriana* and pulled, causing the boat to capsize. They also alleged that, after the boat capsized, the Coast Guard boat was slow to activate rescue operations, failed to maximize the number of people rescued, and engaged in dangerous maneuvers."

The deaths triggered ongoing investigations, including an inquiry by the European Ombudsman opened in November into the Coast Guard's actions and "the role of the European Union border agency Frontex, whose aircraft initially sighted the vessel, while the agency's Fundamental Rights Officer is pursuing his own investigation."

In their contributions to the European Ombudsman's inquiry, and "contend that Frontex should have continued its monitoring of the *Adriana* and issued a mayday call. Frontex told the organizations that it is the responsibility of national authorities to coordinate search and rescue operations and that it did not issue a mayday alert because it did not assess an 'imminent risk to human life.'"

As a nation vital in sealing Europe's southern border, successive Greek governments have committed many crimes in keeping asylum seekers out, including an incident within the last decade in which another ship was put in danger and lives lost as the result of a towing operation—the Farmakonisi shipwreck.

The report notes, "Survivors of the 2014 Farmakonisi shipwreck claimed that the Hellenic Coast Guard tied a rope to tow their boat toward Turkey. A 2021 highlighted other cases in which the Hellenic Coast Guard towed migrant boats out of its waters".

It notes, "In 2022, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Greece for the shortcomings in its rescue efforts and in its subsequent investigations in the 2014 Farmakonisi shipwreck in which 11 people died."

It is well established that the tardy and unserious response of the Greek authorities to calls alerting them that the *Adriana* was in danger was a major factor in the eventual sinking of the vessel. The Greek Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC Piraeus) was first alerted about the *Adriana* at 11:01 EEST on June 13—the day before the boat sank—by the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC Rome).

The report states, "The patrol boat sent by JRCC Piraeus, the PPLS920, was not equipped to perform a large-scale rescue. According to official information, the vessel had only 43 individual life jackets, 8 life preserver rings, 2 inflatable life rafts

able to transport 39 people, and one auxiliary inflatable vessel. JRCC Piraeus did not mobilize other assets, although reports indicate that vessels were available in closer ports, and released the two tankers [previously tasked to monitor and provide assistance to the fishing vessel] despite the PPLS920's limited rescue capacity."

At that stage people were already dead onboard a ship that had been travelling for five days in blistering heat, with refugees packed like sardines in the hold and on the deck. Frontex confirmed to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that the alert stated there were, at that early stage, two dead bodies on the *Adriana*.

The report summarises, "Until the *Adriana* capsized and sank shortly after 02:00 EEST on June 14, and despite formally assuming coordination of the incident and receiving evidence of distress, the Hellenic Coast Guard took limited action to ensure the safety of those aboard."

What was carried out by the Greek Coastguard was a policy of social murder. The remit of the coastguard was to make sure that the boat did not enter Greek waters.

According to the report, "Seven survivors said Greek authorities instructed the *Adriana* via satellite phone to follow the PPLS920 toward Italy. Some of them said the *Adriana* could not keep up with the PPLS920 or experienced engine problems."

Gamal, from Egypt, recalled, "When they tied the rope... they pushed our boat to the left very fast... They go left, the boat sinks left, then they go right, the ship sinks more on the right..."

After this reckless action by the Hellenic Coast Guard, the vessel sank within 20 minutes. "Most survivors said that crew of the PPLS920 did not take immediate action to rescue people after the capsizing, with several saying that the vessel deployed dinghies only 20 to 60 minutes later. Abbas, from Syria, said, 'If they had been serious and come immediately at least 300 would have been rescued.'"

The report rejects claims made by the Greek authorities that those on board said they did not want or require assistance and cites eyewitness testimony that such claims are lies.

In any case, such justifications hold no weight legally. The report notes, "Greek authorities have an obligation under the International Convention on Safety of Life at Sea and the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue to act upon situations of distress at sea..."

"The EU Regulation on Maritime Border Surveillance lists factors relevant to determining a situation of uncertainty, alert, or distress—including a request for assistance, the seaworthiness of the vessel, the number of people on board in relation to the type of vessel, and the presence of deceased persons. Even if some people on the *Adriana* rejected assistance, this does not relieve competent authorities on the scene of their duty to protect lives at sea. The regulation states that the obligation to take 'any measure necessary for the safety of the persons concerned' remains even 'where... the persons on board refuse to accept assistance.'"

The latest victims of Fortress Europe were killed this week when 61 people, mainly from Nigeria, the Gambia and other African nations, died after their boat capsized off Libya's coast. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that there

were 86 people onboard the ship that left Zuwara during the night of December 13/14.

IOM spokesperson Flavio Di Giacomo commented that these deaths were part of the toll of more than 2,250 people who have perished this year already on this particular Mediterranean migration route. According to the IOM's Missing Migrants project, at least 940 migrants were reported dead and 1,248 missing off Libya between 1 January and 18 November. This is a sharp rise on the 529 dead and 848 missing off Libya in 2022.

This is considered a success as far as the bourgeoisie is concerned. The Greek migration ministry reported in November on a 33 percent decrease in the number of migrant arrivals to the country—4,584 compared to 6,863 in October. The ministry attributed the fall positively to its "comprehensive and multi-level strategy" addressing "irregular migration and trafficking". This was "remarkable if compared to the rise of the phenomenon observed elsewhere, such as in Italy, Croatia and also in Spain," it boasted.

This week the European Council on Refugees and Exiles wrote, "In the last few days, the hotline Alarm Phone reported multiple incidents of pushbacks and non-assistance by Greek authorities." Among these were the following:

- "On 5 December, the hotline informed the Hellenic Coastguard about a group of 43 people in distress near Lesvos. The coastguard left the group to drift until it reached the Turkish waters..."
- "On 7 December, 22 people in distress near Lesvos called for assistance and reported that a military boat was near them. Alarm Phone said that the military boat 'is not assisting and instead pushing them (people in distress) further away from the coast' despite seeing that water was entering the refugees' boat... Already in the first week of December, the Hellenic Coastguard have pushed back 6 groups who contacted Alarm Phone', the organisation added.
- "On 11 December, the Turkish Coastguard said in a press release that it had rescued a total of 122 migrants who were pushed back by Greek authorities into Turkish territorial waters.
- "On 13 December, the hotline published an email sent by a group of 17 people, including an unconscious woman, saying, 'We were captured by the Greek Coast Guard near the island of Kos and our boat was destroyed and left at sea begging for urgent help we will die of cold'".



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