

FORGOTTEN TRAGEDY WITH NO CLOSURE

Shipwreck Zuwara 24 August 2014



AFOMAS
Families Of Missing
Asylum Seekers

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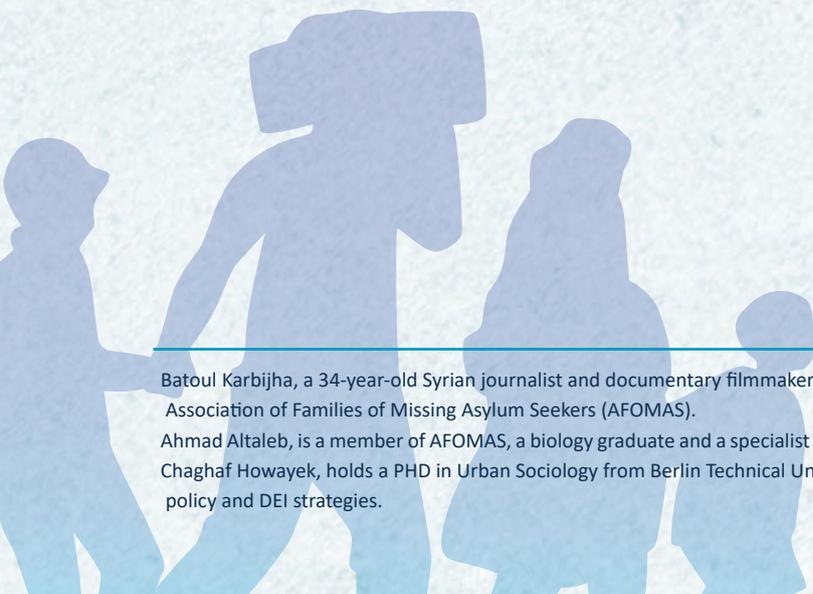
About the Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers:

AFOMAS is an association of Syrian families whose loved ones went missing along asylum and migration routes. Since 2019, families have worked with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) to build a sustained, organized effort. After years of informal coordination and advocacy, AFOMAS was officially launched in Geneva in March 2025 and is registered as an association in France. AFOMAS works to support families, facilitate the exchange of information with relevant institutions, and advocate for truth and justice for the missing.

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Executive Summary



On 24 August 2014, a heavily overcrowded fishing vessel carrying more than 550 people capsized off the coast of Zuwara, Libya, during a rescue operation. While 352 passengers survived, many others drowned. Bodies were recovered in Italy, Tunisia, and Libya, yet a significant number of people remain missing more than a decade later.

This report documents the Zuwara shipwreck and its aftermath from the perspective of families of the missing. It is a family-led, testimony-based account that traces the long search for truth across borders, institutions, and years of uncertainty. Drawing on survivor testimonies, family accounts, open-source information, and engagement with authorities and humanitarian organizations, the report reconstructs what is known about the incident and examines why so many questions remain unanswered.

The findings reveal recurring systemic failures across Italy, Tunisia, and Libya. These include fragmented institutional responses, lack of cross-border coordination, absence of centralized information systems, and limited efforts to identify the deceased or communicate with families. Bodies were buried in unmarked or inaccessible graves, often without proper forensic examination, while families were repeatedly asked to provide information but rarely received follow-up or support.

In the absence of official mechanisms, families organized themselves. Through informal networks and later through the Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers (AFOMAS), families became the primary actors in documenting names, preserving memory, and insisting on the right to know. This report challenges narratives

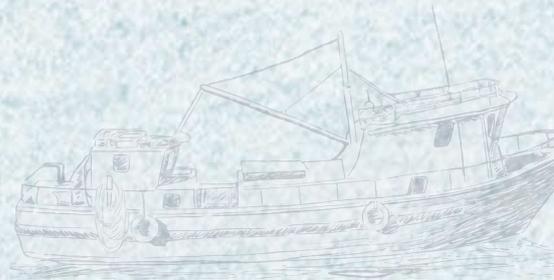
that reduce missing migrants to statistics by restoring names, faces, and family histories to the center of documentation.

The report also raises unresolved questions regarding the fate of those still missing, including the possibility that some victims remain inside the unrecovered sunken vessel, which may constitute a mass grave. Despite identifying the wreck's location, no institutional effort has been made to assess or investigate it.

The report concludes by underscoring states' obligations under international maritime, human rights, and humanitarian law to rescue, search for, identify, and account for missing persons, and to communicate transparently with families. Addressing the legacy of the Zuwara shipwreck requires coordinated action to ensure truth, dignity, and accountability for the missing and those left behind.



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Foreward

Reading through this report, you will connect directly with the heroes of our stories, the families of the missing, and you will hear what they have been going through while searching for their loved ones. This report is a first-hand story written by the families. You will meet a kind of searching that does not look like searching at all. It looks like a father repeating the same names to the same officials, as if names alone can pull someone back from the edge of the sea. It looks like families walking the shoreline and asking the horizon to answer.

We have no map for this loss. No official story that makes sense of the silence. Often, we hold only one certainty simple, unbearable sentences: “My sister is gone.” “I cannot find my brother anymore.” “I want to see them again, talk to them again, hug them again, and tell my children I love them.”

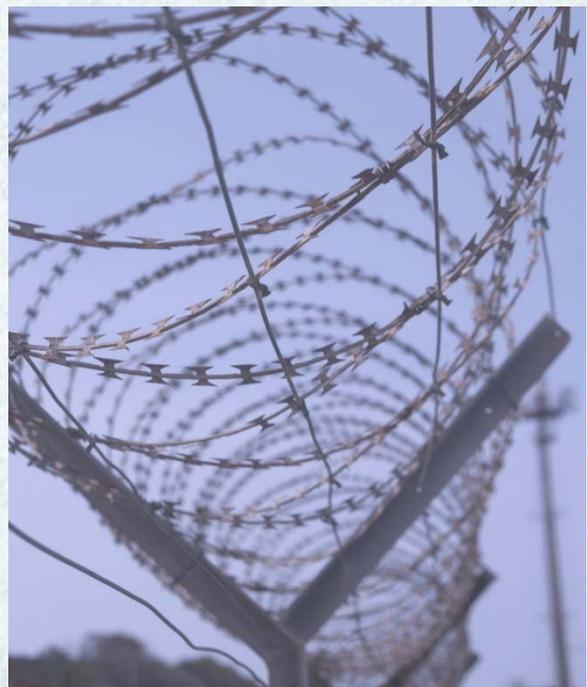
This report exists because these sentences are not the end of the story. They are the beginning of our long struggle: the struggle to know. This report speaks in the voices of families, sometimes as individuals, sometimes as a collective. Because the search for the missing is lived both alone and together.

Many of those who boarded boats like this one had already been forced out of their countries by dictatorship, war, death, detention, and torture. They carried fear in their bodies and hope in a single direction towards the dream that life might finally change on the other shore. But the world conspired with circumstances against them. Borders closed; pathways narrowed; and even the sea, indifferent, and absolutely stood against that dream.

And when the boat is gone, our journey does not end. Our grief becomes a second migration: from office to office, from hotline to hotline, from one authority to another. We search, ask, submit names, send photos, translate documents, make calls across time zones, and wait. We wait in front of the sea for hours, for days, for months while waiting for a sign, for a detail, for anything that can turn uncertainty into truth, and truth into a kind of peace.

This report exists because Sawsan, Rami, Aida, Bilal, Huda, Khaled, and Maria⁽¹⁾ are still missing, and because we are still looking for them, and we will never stop.

Their stories are not isolated. Thousands of Syrians who sought asylum have gone missing at sea, on land, across many countries. They come from different cities, different backgrounds, different beliefs. Yet we share two things: they are missing, and they are loved by families who keep searching even when the world tells them, silently or loudly, to move on.



(1) The names mentioned in this paragraph are codenames of missing persons

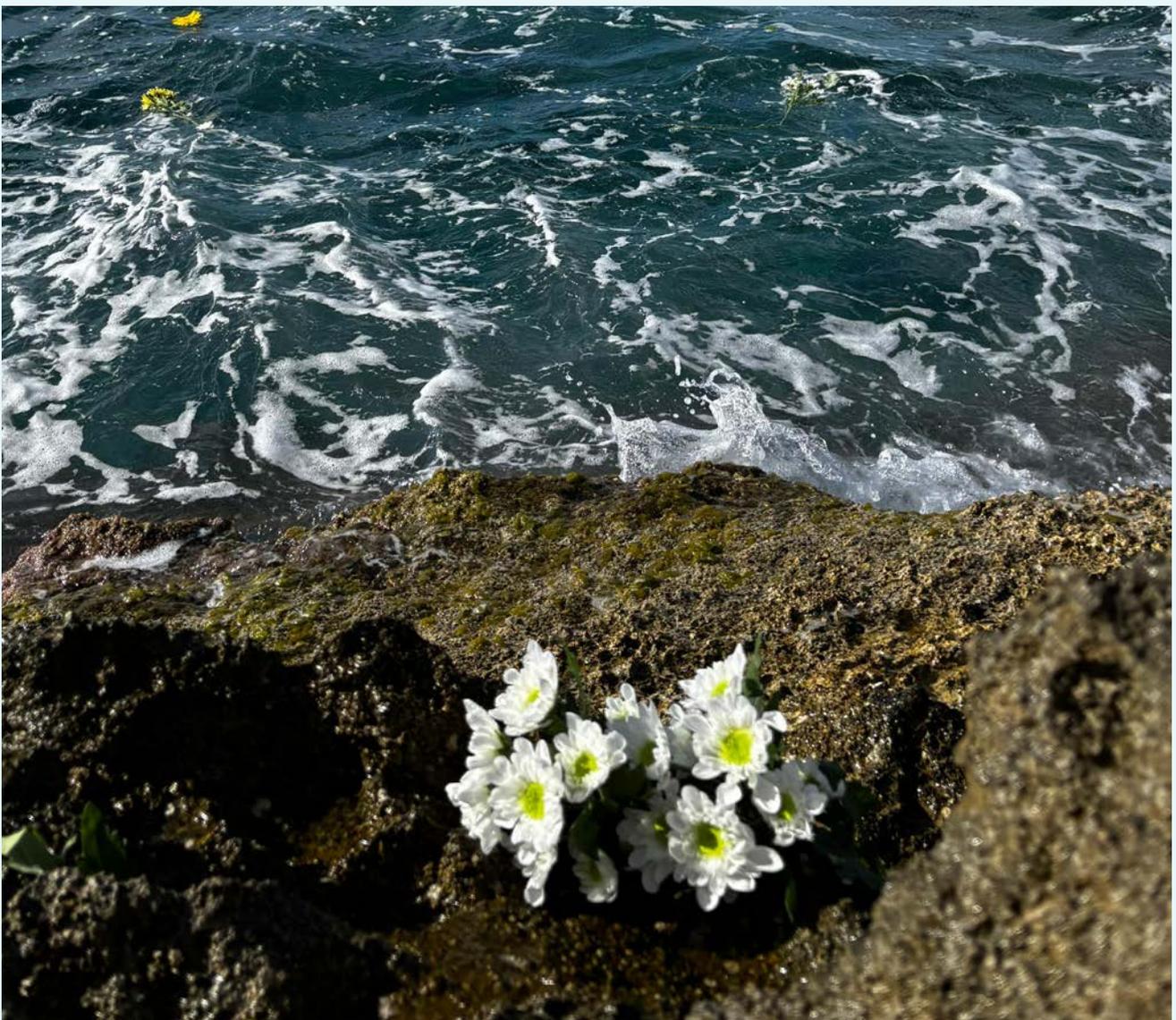
This report is:

» **A** call to families of missing asylum seekers to join AFOMAS to know you are not alone, and that we, too, are families living the same unanswered questions, carrying the same ache, and insisting on the same right: to know where our loved ones are.



» **A** message to institutions and authorities working in the places where our missing were lost: our suffering is real, and this is the full picture of how urgently we need you to understand that the missing are not “cases” or “numbers.” They are precious to us. That is why we ask again and again for answers, for traceability, for dignity, and for action.

» **An** appeal to local governments, authorities, and donors to support and facilitate our search so we are not left to fight the whole world alone, and so the sea is not allowed to swallow both the people and the truth.



Background

We, the families of missing asylum seekers, have learned to organize ourselves in the only way we can: at the speed of panic and hope. Each time an incident occurs and people go missing, families begin searching immediately, often by creating social media groups on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. One family adds another, and then another, until these groups become small worlds made of names, photographs, voice notes, prayers, and fragments of information. Within them, families share everything they find. We contact authorities, reach out to organizations, and repeat the same questions in different languages, to different offices, across borders because we believe answers exist, and because silence cannot be the final destination of the people we love.

This has been happening for years. Yet even as families find one another online, we remain isolated in practice. Many of us have been unable to speak publicly about our suffering, and often unable to approach authorities directly while carrying the weight of unresolved loss. To confront this isolation, to search in a more systematic way, and to activate official mechanisms for tracing the missing, we created **the Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers (AFOMAS)**².



(2) To learn more about AFOMAS please visit: <https://afomas.org/> and our page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/afomas.association/>

This process unfolded gradually. Since 2019, families have collaborated with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) to come together in a more organized and sustained way.



In March 2025, after years of informal coordination and collective advocacy, AFOMAS was officially launched as an association. Since its official launch, AFOMAS has reached out to international and Syrian institutions to ensure that the stories of missing asylum seekers are documented, preserved, and kept on the agenda of authorities and decision-makers.



As part of this effort, AFOMAS has engaged with multiple entities working on missing persons and accountability, including the National Commission of Missing Persons (NCMP), the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), the International Commission of Missing Persons (ICMP), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Argentinian Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), and representatives of EU member states and the European Commission. These engagements have taken the form of meetings, exchanges of information, advocacy, and repeated requests for support aimed at establishing effective tracing, identification, and communication mechanisms for families.

AFOMAS has also joined other families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Syria through the Truth and Justice Charter, building solidarity across different forms of disappearance and loss. These connections reflect a shared understanding: **that the right to know the fate of the missing does not end at borders, and that families must not be left to search alone.**



Alongside advocacy and coordination, AFOMAS works to preserve the individual stories of the missing through memorialization and storytelling. Families share photographs, memories, and facts about their loved ones as they were before their journeys in search of safety. We aim to keep families at the center of this work not as passive witnesses or information providers, but as leaders of the search itself. Over time, we observed that most reports and public narratives about missing migrants are written by external experts, while families are often reduced to sources or beneficiaries. This report is part of an effort to challenge that pattern by documenting the search from the perspective of those who live its consequences every day.

This report is written by **Batoul Karbijha**, the sister of **Maysoon**³, who went missing on 24 August 2014⁴, and by **Ahmad Altaleb**, the cousin of **Sawsan and Ghaith**, who went missing off the coast of Egypt in September 2014⁵.



(3) For security reasons, all names of families and missing persons used in this report are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated. The names Batoul, Maysoon, Mohammad and Haitham Karbijha are real, as Batoul is the author narrating his own story. The name of the secondary author Ahmad Altaleb, Sawsan and Ghaith are also real. (5) Information about the incident can be found here: <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/110851.aspx>

Our work has only begun. It will continue until we achieve our goals:



uncovering the truth about the fate of those missing along asylum routes;



strengthening justice mechanisms in missing persons cases;



reinforcing the role of families in these processes;



building support networks for families of missing asylum seekers;



ensuring that disappearances on migration routes are addressed within transitional justice frameworks;



preventing future disappearances; and keeping the memory of the missing alive.

This work also exists within a wider global context of migration and disappearance.

Since 2014, the **International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrants Project**⁶ has recorded more than **72,000** deaths and disappearances worldwide, a figure that is likely an undercount due to the large number of undocumented cases. Among the nationalities most affected are Afghans, Rohingya from Myanmar, and Syrians families from different places⁷, united by the same uncertainty and the same unresolved questions.

(4) Information about the incident can be found on <https://news.un.org/en> in the article (More than 300 die in boat tragedies on Mediterranean, marking year's deadliest week – UN) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/08/475922>

(6) <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1098aa8ecb07417ab4276607092149cc>

(7) <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migrant-deaths-and-disappearances?utm>



Ethical and Methodological Note

This report is based on testimonies from families of the missing, survivor accounts, and information gathered from authorities, humanitarian organizations, and open sources.

The available data varies in accuracy and completeness due to the undocumented nature of the journey and the absence of centralized official records.

Exact numbers, dates, and locations cannot always be conclusively verified. While multiple family

members confirmed key details related to the shipwreck, some discrepancies remain particularly because several maritime tragedies involving Syrian refugees occurred during the same period in late August 2014⁸.

Where uncertainty exists, it is acknowledged transparently. The report does not claim absolute completeness, but rather reflects the most accurate reconstruction possible based on the information families were able to access and verify.

(8) <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/three-boat-tragedies-five-days-mediterranean-scores-feared-dead>

Introduction

This is the story of my journey to search for my sister, Maysoon, who went missing at 20 years old in the shipwreck off the coast of Zuwara, Libya, on **August 24, 2014**. That day marked the beginning of a wound that has never fully closed. What started as a desperate attempt to understand what happened to her soon became a much larger journey one that continues long after the writing of this report.

My name is **Batoul Karbijha**, a 34-year-old Syrian journalist and documentary filmmaker, now based in the Netherlands. I fled Syria in April 2014, following the horrific circumstances of the arbitrary detention of my brother Mohammad by the Assad regime and the growing sense of danger that followed. After his release in August 2014, we were explicitly warned to leave the country to save our lives. The systematic torture, deaths, and enforced disappearances inside Syrian detention facilities have been widely documented, revealing the scale of violence that forced many families, including mine, to flee⁹. A few months after my departure, my sister Maysoon, my father, and my brother attempted the same journey.

Since Maysoon's disappearance, my work has focused primarily on refugees and missing migrants. As part of this commitment, I became one of the founders of **AFOMAS**, the Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers.

Maysoon was my youngest sister. She was 20 years old when she fled Syria and went missing in the Mediterranean. She was traveling with my father and my brother, who both survived, while she did not.

Maysoon was a young woman full of dreams, an aspiring architect, a musician, and a singer. She loved life, freedom, and dignity. Her only hope was to live in safety and to pursue her goals and ambitions. That hope ended on 24 August 2014.

When I first began searching for Maysoon, I believed that finding answers would be a matter of time, that somewhere there would be a record, a name, or a sign. But the deeper I went, the more I discovered the layers of silence surrounding this tragedy. I met survivors who carried memories too painful to recount, officials who avoided questions, and institutions that had long stopped looking. Each conversation revealed both fragments of truth and the vastness of what remained unknown. Like many other families of the missing, I learned that social media and informal networks often become the only tools available for tracing loved ones across borders¹⁰.

Along this path, I met many other families, mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who were also searching for loved ones lost in the same shipwreck or in other crossings along the Central Mediterranean route. Their stories echoed mine. We shared the same photographs, the same unanswered messages, and the same long nights of imagining what might have happened. Our grief, though personal, was mirrored in one another.

Out of these encounters grew something collective: the Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers (**AFOMAS**). Together, **we decided that silence was no longer an option.**

(9) Human Rights Watch, *If the Dead Could Speak: Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria's Detention Facilities* (2015): <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/12/16/if-dead-could-speak/mass-deaths-and-torture-syrias-detention-facilities>

(10) Andy Greenberg, "How One Refugee Is Using Social Media to Find His Missing Brother," *WIRED* (2017): <https://www.wired.com/2017/04/locating-missing-refugees-social-media/>

AFOMAS became a space where families could share information, seek justice, and remind the world that those who disappeared at sea were not faceless numbers, but people with names, lives, and families who still wait for them.

This journey also became the subject of my documentary film *My Maysoon*, which follows my search for my sister and the human stories behind this single tragedy¹¹. While the film captures the emotional side of this search, this report aims to go deeper into the facts: to reconstruct what happened during the Zuwara shipwreck, to document what information could be

verified, and to share the challenges faced by me and by other families while seeking truth in a landscape defined by bureaucracy, indifference, and absence of responsibility.

Behind every statistic about migration across the Mediterranean lies a story like ours. Through this report, I hope to reclaim at least one of those names, my sister's, and to remind the world that each disappearance leaves behind not only loss, but also a chain of people still searching.

This is my journey to find Maysoon. It is also the journey of many others who continue to search for those the sea has taken, and for the truth that still lies beneath its surface.



(11) *My Maysoon* (documentary film), First Hand Films:
<https://www.firsthandfilms.com/films/My+Maysoon/1000595>

The Shipwreck: What Happened on August 24, 2014?

Like many Syrians, my father, my brother Mohammad, and Maysoon were forced to leave Syria in great haste, without a clear destination. The absence of safe and legal pathways, combined with the impossibility of applying for asylum from a distance when time and resources are scarce, pushed my family to follow the same route I had taken.

At the time, they traveled from **Beirut, Lebanon, to Algeria**, and from there crossed the desert into Libya after reaching an agreement with a smuggler. The journey through the desert was devastating, long, harsh, and extremely dangerous. By the time my family arrived in Libya, they were already exhausted. They were held for two nights in a warehouse, where large numbers

of refugees from different nationalities were gathered in inhuman conditions.

On the night of **24 August 2014**, the boat arrived, and my family was forced on board. The smugglers operated with weapons, using violence and intimidation to control people, leaving no possibility to refuse or resist. The vessel was a heavily overcrowded **fishing trawler**, unfit for carrying so many lives. It departed from the port city of **Zuwara**¹², Libya, carrying over **550**¹³ people, mostly **Syrian families** fleeing the ongoing war, along with others from **Palestine, sub-Saharan Africa, and Pakistan**. Survivors estimate the actual number of passengers may have exceeded **550**. My father, Haitham, my brother Mohammad, and my sister Maysoon set out on that journey.



(12) Zuwara (Zuwarah/Zwara) is an Amazigh-majority coastal port city in northwestern Libya on the Mediterranean Sea, located about 100 km west of Tripoli and roughly 60 km from the Tunisian border.

(13) The exact number of people on board was never verified. Accounts estimate between 450 passengers, and as high as 700.

Shortly after departure, the boat began to experience **engine failure** while still in **Libyan territorial waters**. When a helicopter arrived, the smugglers feared interception and pushed the powerless boat into what the passengers believed to be **international waters**¹⁴ , leaving them adrift.

Later that evening, at around **19:58**, three Italian naval vessels, **Pattugliatore Foscari**, **Corvetta Fenice**, and a third unidentified patrol ship approached the boat as part of the **Mare Nostrum** operation¹⁵ , responding to a distress call. But as the rescuers neared, panic broke out on board. Dozens of passengers rushed toward one side of the vessel, hoping to be rescued. The sudden shift in weight caused the already unstable boat to capsize, throwing hundreds into the sea.

Only 352 people were rescued, including my brother Mohammad and my father Haitham. 24 bodies were recovered in the following hours. The remaining approximately 170 individuals, many of them women and children, were never found and are presumed to have drowned. Among them was my sister, **Maysoon**.

This shipwreck, though one of several that year, gained attention for the Italian authorities' efforts to identify the victims via social media. With no DNA testing or official documentation available, Facebook was used to share images of personal belongings found with the bodies¹⁶. Using this approach, 23 of the 24 bodies were eventually identified, most of them Syrian, providing a rare moment of closure for some grieving families.



352
Rescued.



24
Recovered.



+170
Lost at Sea.



(14) Sea areas beyond any country's territorial waters (generally beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast), where no state has sovereignty but international maritime law still applies, including duties to assist people in distress.

(16) <https://www.wired.com/2017/04/locating-missing-refugees-social-media/>

(15) page 23 of the report Lives Adrift by Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Lives-Adrift-Refugees-and-Migrants-in-Peril-in-the-Central-Mediterranean.pdf>

Families' Accounts

The following section brings together testimonies from survivors and families of those who went missing in the Zuwara shipwreck. These accounts reflect personal memory shaped by trauma, loss, and the absence of official information. Differences in details, numbers, and interpretations are part of this lived experience and are presented here without correction.

When the accident occurred, the situation descended into chaos. Many survivors, including my father and my brother, did not know whether others had been rescued by the accompanying vessel or left behind at sea. It was only after they reached Italy that they realized a large number of passengers were still missing and that only **24 bodies** had been recovered. Families who were not on the journey learned about the shipwreck only after the survivors arrived in Italy.

When my brother called me to say, “*Maysoon is missing,*” I felt completely broken. At the time, I was living in a refugee camp, which made the shock and grief even harder to bear. The emotional toll prevented me from conducting any research for several years. A few days after the accident, my father and brother joined me in the Netherlands. From that moment on, Mohammad made repeated attempts to contact the Italian authorities, the Dutch police, and the Red Cross. None of these efforts resulted in clear answers or meaningful information.

Families of the missing Syrians - including mine - created a group on Facebook Messenger¹⁷ to share information and support one another in their search for answers. Many of them made intensive efforts to locate their loved ones, contacting officials, aid organizations, and media outlets but these efforts largely proved unsuccessful. Over the years, families were bombarded with unverified and false information, including rumors that their missing relatives had been detained in Libya or Italy, or were victims of human trafficking. Despite these painful uncertainties, most of the families remain in contact, and several are now reachable through the **Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers**.

Survivors of the shipwreck describe the events of that night through fragments of memory shaped by fear and confusion. Among the survivors of the shipwreck are my brother Mohammad and my father, Haitham. According to their account, the fishing trawler was dangerously overcrowded, and its engine broke down even before the journey properly began. Another boat, operated by smugglers, arrived and towed the vessel for about eight hours into deeper waters and then suddenly disappeared, leaving them adrift in the open sea¹⁸.



(17) This was a private chat group called “أهالي حبايبنا الغالين”, which included more than 100 family members at the time of the accident. The group served as a space where families shared information, resources, and emotional support. By January 2026, the group had only 49 members, as many families left Facebook or withdrew from the group due to fading hope and prolonged uncertainty.

(18) According to survivors' experience, the smugglers usually push the vessels into international waters so the passengers are not to be returned to the country of the beginning of the journey such as Libya in this case. Also see: <https://www.wired.com/2017/04/locating-missing-refugees-social-media/>

After hours of exhaustion, they saw the three naval ships and a helicopter arrive in response to a distress signal. However, the rescue vessels remained at a distance for several hours, inspecting and filming, which created panic and fear among the passengers. A small rubber rescue boat later approached from one side and began distributing life jackets. This led to a sudden shift, as passengers crowded to one side of the already unstable trawler. Many had already begun jumping into the water out of fear, further destabilizing the boat. In those chaotic moments, the vessel capsized, flipping upside down and plunging hundreds into the sea.

Mohammad (Brother of Maysoon, Syrian, Male, 35 years old)¹⁹ recalls:

“I didn’t want to jump, because I saw so many women and children on the boat. Jumping meant risking their lives even more. At the last minute, my father jumped and turned to pull Maysoon with him. I was behind her, pushing her up to follow. But at that exact moment, the boat flipped. I lost sight of her. I thought maybe another rescue boat had picked her up. When we reached Italy, we waited and waited. But no one came. Later, we realized she hadn’t survived. I don’t know if she drowned, or if she was pushed under, or if her head struck something and she died immediately.”

Mohammad said this with deep sorrow. Maysoon never wanted to leave Damascus where she had her entire community, her studies, her life was there. But after my brother Mohammad was released after having been detained by the Assad regime, the family had no choice. They no longer felt safe, and they decided to leave.

My family was not alone in this tragedy. Syrians everywhere were forced into the same path, whether because of bombings, the war, losing their homes, forced conscription, or countless other reasons²⁰. Dhirar, a close friend of my brother Mohammad, was on the same boat with him and went missing as well.

Siwar, (Dhirar’s brother, Syrian, Male, 38 years old)²¹ told me:

*“He left Lebanon for Algeria, and then continued to Libya, hoping to find a safe way to reach Europe. Our last phone call was that summer, just before he boarded the boat. He told me, in a voice trying to hide his fear: ‘I can’t take it anymore. I need to reach a safe place. **I don’t want my daughter to grow up afraid like us.**’ Since that call, I have never heard his voice again.”*

Dhirar was married and had a baby daughter who wasn’t yet one year old when he left. He worked as a photographer, known for his gentle smile and peaceful soul. Siwar adds:

“On 24 August 2014, the boat set sail from the Libyan city of Zuwara. It was large, three stories high, carrying more than 700 migrants²² of different nationalities: Syrians, Palestinians, and Africans. But the journey that was supposed to end on a European shore ended with the loss of hundreds of lives. It is estimated that between 250 and 400 people went missing. We never knew exactly where the boat sank, whether in Italian territorial waters or international waters. We did not know who the smuggler was, nor what those final hours were like.”

(19) This testimony was recorded in 2022, and the age indicated reflects that moment in time.

(20) For better understanding of the situation in Syria which led thousands to flee the country, read the COI report on the systematic violations in Syria in the year 2014: <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhrc/2014/en/20894>

(21) This testimony was recorded in 2025, and the age indicated reflects that moment in time.

(22) The exact number of people on board was never verified. Some accounts estimate approximately 450 passengers, while others suggest the number may have been as high as 700.

Different families recall the journey through partial information, images, and messages that never led to certainty.

Jamila (Daughter of Iyad, Syrian, female, 35 years old)²³ and her family fled from Douma during the war, relocating to another area in Damascus after intense bombing, as so many Syrian families were forced to do. According to her, her father, Iyad, had traveled ten days before the accident, taking a route through Algeria to Libya.

She added that the smugglers forced people onto the boat at gunpoint.

“The boat departed at 1:00 a.m. on August 24, 2014. After approximately 17 hours at sea, the engine broke down in Italian territorial waters. Water then began to leak into the boat due to overcrowding and the large number of passengers, and eventually, the boat capsized.”

Jamila continues:

“I personally saw a photo of my father on one of the rescue boats, and several eyewitnesses confirmed seeing him swimming after the boat sank. I recognized him in the image, and I am 90% certain it was him.”

The absence of information and the lack of coordination between organizations leave families relying on unreliable sources. They don't know where to begin or whom to turn to. All they know is that they and their loved ones are treated as though they are unworthy.

For some, the search has been sustained almost entirely through what circulated on social media and word of mouth.

Widad (Sister of Fares, Syrian, Female, 34 years old)²⁴ lost her brother Fares in the same incident. Fares, a father of two young children under the age of five, was forced to flee his home in Daraa with his family.

After enduring the hardships of displacement, he saw no other option but to take the dangerous sea route in hopes of securing a better future for them. His journey took him from Egypt to Algeria, and finally to Libya, where he boarded the same ill-fated boat and went missing.

Widad recalls:

“What we later learned from posts shared on social media groups and pages was that when the Italian Coast Guard rescue ships arrived, people rushed to one side of the boat, toward the rescue vessels, which caused it to capsize due to the sudden mass movement.”

“When photos of a boat were published, which we didn't know whether it belonged to the Red Crescent or the United Nations, we recognized him in one of the pictures, sitting at the front. We also heard that many families identified their missing loved ones at that time, and we expected someone would contact us, but nothing happened”

This is what families are left with: hope without answers, pain without information. They live suspended between possibilities, relying only on what they feel, not what they know.

Siwar captures this uncertainty painfully well:

“Sometimes I believe he is still alive somewhere, and sometimes I surrender to the idea that the sea has taken him to a place beyond what eyes can reach. But he will never be erased from our memory or from our hearts. Dhirar is not a number on a list of the missing, he is my brother.”

Together, these accounts reflect the shared uncertainty families continue to live with, shaped by fragments of memory, unanswered questions, and the absence of official truth.

(23) This testimony was recorded in 2025, and the age indicated reflects that moment in time.

(24) This testimony was recorded in 2025, and the age indicated reflects that moment in time.

The Search Across Borders

The search for answers following the Zuwara shipwreck unfolded unevenly across countries, shaped by different legal systems, institutional responses, and degrees of access.

1.1 Italy's Response

Of the bodies recovered, 24 were taken to Italy by the Italian Navy. Most were identified through a Facebook-based investigation conducted by Italian police officer **Angelo Milazzo**. Using clothing, documents, and other personal items, he was able to identify 23 of the bodies, though he did not disclose the names due to privacy and personal data regulations. At the time, this effort was a unique and unprecedented initiative that appeared to be largely personal, and it was deeply appreciated²⁵.

However, 24 bodies represent only a small fraction of the hundreds who went missing. Local and international media coverage of the incident was minimal, and Milazzo explained to me that the low number of retrieved bodies contributed to the lack of attention. Italian authorities never publicly acknowledged that many others remained missing, which further limited media coverage. As a result, the tragedy was largely reduced to a headline of “24 dead”²⁶

a number considered too small to compete for sustained media attention.

What strikes me, as a sister, is the rescue operation itself.

When a boat capsized with three rescue vessels and a helicopter present, how could it be left to sink with people still on board? How could all those resources fail to recover the bodies, either by diving or by calling for additional help? It is shocking to think how little value was given to those lives, abandoned in the middle of the sea, leaving behind not only my tragedy but countless others.

During my visit to Italy in 2021 while searching for Maysoon, I posed these questions to Angelo Milazzo. He did not appear to have an answer, and he was the only official who agreed to speak with me.

I also attempted to visit several anonymous graves of refugees in Sicily, but they did not appear to be connected to the 24 August incident, which is understandable given that the accident occurred far from Italian waters. Yet it broke my heart to see these graves marked only with numbers, with no effort made to trace them back to the families or restore their identities.

(25) <https://www.wired.com/2017/04/locating-missing-refugees-social-media/>

(26) (Tragedia in the mediterranean sea): [https://www.linkiesta.it/2014/08/mediteralso-raneo-tragedia-senza-fine/,,](https://www.linkiesta.it/2014/08/mediteralso-raneo-tragedia-senza-fine/)

While official statements from Italy insisted that no additional bodies or survivors from the 24th August accident were recovered within their territory, a leaked police document²⁷ later revealed that bodies had also been found in Tunisia and Libya, highlighting the broader scale of the tragedy.



PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE (PROCURA DELLA REPUBBLICA)

at the Court of SIRACUSA

Interagency Group for Combating Illegal Immigration

Tel. 0931-752666 – Fax 0931-694432

E-mail: picc.procurasiracusa@giustizia.it

Prot.: 902/14 Gick

Siracusa, 05/11/2015

SUBJECT: P.P. 9005/14 mod. 21 – Service report on activities for the identification of bodies, shipwreck of 24/08/2014, disembarkation of 26/08/2014 at the Commercial Port of Augusta of no. 352 shipwreck survivors and 24 bodies.

To Dr. Marco DI MAURO
Deputy Public Prosecutor

IN OFFICE

The undersigned Chief Inspector P.M. Angelo MILAZZO, following the service order of 28/08/2014 issued by the head of the G.I.C.I.C., Deputy Superintendent Carlo PARINI, and pursuant to the delegations of the Deputy Public Prosecutor Dr. Martina BONFIGLIO (Attachments 1, 2 and 3), hereby transmits the outcome of the activities carried out to date, stating that of the 24 bodies, 21 have been identified by family members.

The following three bodies remain to be identified:

(27) This document was obtained via a confidential private source.
The translation of the photograph is in the annexes

1.2 Tunisia: The Unmarked Graves

After intensive research for the remaining bodies, I decided to visit Tunisia in 2022, hoping to find any information about Maysoon. I discovered²⁸ that 54 bodies were washed ashore and buried at **El Ketef Port in Ben Gardane**²⁹. Mustafa Abed Alkabeer, Head of the Human Rights Department in Ben Gardane, confirmed to me that nine of them were women and four children. Out of the 54 bodies, documents and passports of 24 of them were recovered from the scene, revealing seven female names, though one of the women was later found alive, leaving 8 unidentified female victims.

He also mentioned to me that the bodies were collected on the 31st of August and buried on the 1st of September. Some names in this list correspond to the missing persons list and the names of the survivors; that is how I linked this cemetery to the accident. However, another accident happened on the 23rd of August and included a lot of Syrians as well, and there is no way to confirm if those bodies belong to this accident or the other.

What followed was not a single discovery, but a series of partial confirmations and renewed uncertainty.

He told me that no DNA testing or proper forensic examination was conducted on the recovered bodies. Only a few documents were found, and the bodies were buried without any thorough investigation.

During my visit to Tunisia, I personally viewed six female bodies' photos taken by a local photographer³⁰. None matched Maysoon's description. A trusted volunteer who contributed to the burial process mentioned that all six women wore hijabs, making it even less likely that one of them was my sister.

(28) This fact had been known to many families since the accident occurred; however, I only became aware of it during the course of my research.

(29) El Ketef Port is a fishing port located near the town of Ben Gardane in southern Tunisia, close to the border with Libya. It is primarily known in international news as a location where the Tunisian navy and coastguard bring ashore rescued migrants attempting the perilous sea crossing to Europe from the North African coast.

However, he noted an important detail: despite being a mass grave, stones had been placed between the bodies to separate them.

When I was reviewing the photos, I felt a numbness inside me. Part of me was silently praying that she was not among them; perhaps that part could not bear to see Maysoon's body swollen, neglected, or abandoned. In my mind, she remained the beautiful Maysoon I remembered, and I wanted to preserve that image. Yet another, more rational part of me knew that seeing the truth was necessary to find closure.

I then visited the burial site in **Tunisia**, with the help of the photographer who assisted in locating the grave. The site barely resembled a cemetery. It is an abandoned area within a **military zone**, inaccessible to the public. I was shocked to see it filled with rubble, a deserted space with no signage or indication that it was a burial ground. I spoke with the National Guard on site, but they were not even aware of its existence. To this day, I keep wondering: what will happen to the bodies buried here? What if a building is constructed on this land?



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(30) Photos are available upon request from the main author.

(31) This photo was taken by the photographer during the burial process.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) denied any connection to this cemetery. However, Monji Isleem, Head of the Red Crescent in Ben Gardane, told me that the ICRC had sent a South African forensic expert, who estimated that identifying the bodies would cost \$1.5 million, which was a big budget to handle.

This fact was shocking to me. **1.5 million** does not seem like a large sum for an organization running thousands of operations, especially considering the other resources, funds, and donations that could be mobilized for this purpose. I imagine that even families would have been willing to contribute. What troubled me most was that **we, the families, were never informed** about this. When I confronted the ICRC with this information, they denied it entirely, leaving me confronted with the bureaucratic weight of an organization characterized by weak internal coordination and, in my view, the appearance of systemic mismanagement.



Photo of El Ketef Port in Ben Gardane in google maps.

1.3 The Search in Libya

Information from Libya remains the most limited and difficult to verify, shaped by insecurity, restricted access, and the absence of transparent official records.

According to an Italian report, around 60 bodies washed ashore in Libya, but no data exists regarding their identities or exact locations.

Visiting Libya was both unsafe and ultimately unproductive for me, especially since I had *no reliable information to begin with*. As a result, I limited my research to remote methods.

I found evidence of a burial process that took place on August 25, 2014, just one day after the shipwreck. Bodies were buried in the **Ber Al'Osta Melad cemetery** in Tripoli by the Libyan Red Crescent. However, the link between these bodies and the shipwreck remains unclear. A Journalist who doesn't want his name to be mentioned, who has been investigating the **Ber Al'Osta Melad cemetery**, informed me that all the bodies buried there were migrants who left from Tripoli and washed ashore in Tripoli. He insisted that there is no connection between those victims and the shipwreck off Zuwara. He also revealed that multiple migrant cemeteries exist in Zuwara and that the Red Crescent assisted in burying bodies there. According to his sources, DNA samples were collected from all the deceased, but the crucial question remains: *where is this data stored?* The Libyan Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Public Prosecution Department (PPD) should have the records, but access has proven impossible so far.

I attempted to gather resources from Libya, but it proved extremely challenging. Eventually, I was provided with a contact number for someone referred to as **Dr. Essam**³² from the Libyan Red Crescent, though his full name remains unclear. While he confirmed many mass graves of refugees are located in Zuwara, he refused to share any data unless I traveled to Zuwara in person. I am to make the trip if I can first confirm that relevant information exists.

Across all three contexts, families encountered the same outcome: partial information, blocked access, and the absence of a coordinated response capable of answering the most basic question *where are our loved ones?*



(32) The full name and position of the individual were never disclosed to me, not even by the source themselves.

The Missing: Names and Faces

How families documented the missing

Following the shipwreck, families did not hesitate to share any information related to their missing loved ones. They circulated names, photographs, and contact details, often including phone numbers, in the hope that someone might recognize or locate them. In practice, families became a primary source of information and resources. Yet this collective knowledge was left unsupported and largely unrecognized; in many cases, families were treated not as partners but as a burden. Personally, I often felt that the more information I gathered, the more I was rejected by those in positions of decision-making.

During my search I have compiled and archived a list of individuals reported missing in the 24 August 2014 incident, based on information provided by families, open sources and available documentation. To protect privacy and ensure the responsible use of sensitive data, this list is not published in full; it can be shared upon request through AFOMAS, subject to consent and appropriate safeguards.

About the list

Families have also compiled a list of names primarily from *open sources*, especially social media. The list documents the names of Syrian individuals who went missing during the Zuwara shipwreck on 24 August 2014. The information was gathered from publicly available materials, including media reports, Facebook posts, survivor testimonies, and interviews with families.

Where possible, names have been translated into English, and photographs³³ have been included to restore a human face to those who disappeared.

While our estimates suggest that approximately **170 people** remain unaccounted for, not all cases were officially reported by families, and the actual number may be higher.

This list is not exhaustive, but it represents a significant effort to document the missing persons who remain missing.



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(33) Photographs are available upon request from the main author. They have not been included in this report out of respect for the privacy and dignity of the missing individuals and their families.

(34) The translation of the photograph is in the annexes: <https://www.facebook.com/syrianpresscenter/photos/a.1387585178150756/1498251250417481/?id=1387572298152044>

List of missing and identified persons

These figures come from different sources and locations and should be read as partial datasets rather than a single consolidated count.

The number of names on the list published on special media for the Syrian missing persons of the incident was 147 persons. I was informed that there are 54 bodies buried in Tunisia, then I received a list of 24 names of persons who were washed ashore and buried at **El Ketef Port in Ben Gardane**. Among the list, there were 21 Syrian persons according to the documents collected from the bodies, and they were from several Syrian cities such as Damascus, Damascus Suburbs, Daraa, Idlib, Lattakia, and Raqqa. Among them there were 5 babies and 16 adults, and 7 females and 14 males.

This list is an act of documentation and remembrance, and a record of the gaps left by the absence of an official, coordinated identification process.

نوع الترفيق	رقم الترفيق	صاحب الترفيق	التاريخ و مكان الولادة
هواز مطر	006286547	محمد بن يحيى الدين المصطفى	1977-05-09 دمشق
	003416338	وسيم محمد بن أمين الشوحة	1975-01-01 دمشق
	006197792	هيثم بن احمد شكو	1978-02-18 ريف دمشق
	009291991	ساره بن رضوان العاصمي	1989-03-25 اربعا سورية
	007437631	رشدا بنت محمد العنان الرز	1986-05-17 دمشق
	007763705	نادي بنت كمال الدين توفيق	1985-10-05 ريف دمشق
	009322332	محمد بن جمعة العنور	1967-05-04 ريف دمشق
	007763706	عمر بن محمد المصطفى	2011-02-01 ريف دمشق
	009291581	الكرم بن قبايش الجوارية	غير واضح
	009291993	ميرا بنت الكرم الجوارية	2011-02-08 اربعا سورية
	009291999	محمود بن الكرم الجوارية	2013-03-18 اربعا سورية
	009291998	ماريا بنت الكرم الجوارية	2012-02-14 اربعا سورية
	009291992	يوسف بن الكرم الجوارية	2014-07-01 اربعا سورية
	001077467	قنان بن هيثم حجازي	1988-11-09 دمشق سورية
	0056391311	حسن بن فوزان الخراسي	1973-12-01 دمشق سورية
	006640926	ايلاف بن محمد العنان الزهبي	1979-07-11 اربعا سورية
	004741628	شادي بن محمد طارق معراوي	1986-01-25 ادب سورية
	WR2752316	جمال مجدي	1980-10-01 مغربي النسيبة
	12100032644	وسيم بن محمد أمين الشوحة	1975-01-01 دمشق
	01010350869	رشدا بنت محمد العنان الرز	1986-05-17 دمشق
	01010239160	مراء بن محمد حسان العنان	1993-01-01 اللاذقية سورية
	01250043296	هيثم بن احمد شكو	1978-02-18 معلية سورية
	03100010763	جمعة بن محمد العنور	ريف دمشق سورية
	01010096776	قنان بن هيثم حجازي	1988-11-09 دمشق سورية
01010047819	أسامة بن فاروق أبو حمزة	1987-09-17 دمشق سورية	
12060054992	ايلاف بن محمد العنان الزهبي	1979-07-11 اللاذقية سورية	
IA72218	جمال مجدي	1980-10-01 طي زركل خارجة	
47585	محمد المصطفى بن يحيى الدين	1977 ريف دمشق	
971960	محمود الشكان بن عبد	1975 الرقة القروية سورية	
421160	الكرم قبايش الجوارية	1976 اربعا سورية	
72371	وسيم بن محمد أمين	1975 دمشق سورية	
2519483	عنان بن ايضوم الأسود	1986-01-27 الثورة لبنان	
80989	جمال مجدي	1980 مغربي النسيبة	
47676	قنان بن هيثم حجازي	1977 دمشق سورية	
277722	أسامة أبو حمزة بن فاروق	1987 دمشق سورية	
21522	ايلاف بن محمد العنان الزهبي	1979 اللاذقية سورية	
M01KX79270	مصعب محمد عثمان سائل	سوداني النسيبة	
مطر حناني			1977-05-09 دمشق
بطاقة تابعة لوزارة الداخلية السورية (الطون المديان)	2483991	احمد بن عبد النبي	الطن معلية سورية

35 36

(35) The translation of the photograph is in the annexes. The photograph includes the missing + identified/recovered persons list

(36) Where photographs are included, they are published with family consent and for identification and memorialization purposes.

The Unanswered Question: Where Are the Remaining Victims?

Despite recovered bodies in several countries, a significant number of people from the Zuwara shipwreck remain unaccounted for.

Adding up the confirmed bodies found in Italy, Tunisia, and Libya, we account for approximately **138** individuals³⁷. This leaves many unaccounted for. Some bodies may have been lost at sea, but another possibility remains:

Are the missing still inside the sunken boat?

Italian authorities never retrieved the vessel, making this a **potential mass grave**. My search did not stop here, and I began looking for the sunken boat. Until then, all available information suggested that the boat was in international waters. At this point, the search shifted from tracing people to tracing the site of the disaster itself. Finding the boat became a way to confront the possibility that the missing had never left it.

Locating the Sunken Boat

After extensive research, I was unable to locate the boat. Finally, while reviewing a video of the incident recorded by the Italian authorities, I noticed the coordinates displayed in the corner. Using this information, I was able to identify the location of the wreck and **confirm that the boat remains in Libyan waters**.

33° 19.82'N, 12° 10.84'E (or 33.3394444, 12.19).

Yet many questions remain unanswered: after all these years, could any bodies still be there? Is the shipwreck itself intact, or have the currents carried it far away? How deep is the sea at this location, and what would it take to reach it safely? Are there any authorities or organizations willing to invest in a proper search for these missing lives? Now that the location of the sinking ship is known, the next challenge is finding specialized divers and experts who can recover the bodies in a scientifically and ethically appropriate manner.

Despite the fact that many bodies were washed ashore in Libya and Tunisia, there have been no efforts to exhume the bodies or carry out identification processes that would allow families to bury their loved ones with dignity. These efforts remain ongoing, and this highlights the complex intersection of hope, technical difficulty, and institutional responsibility that continues to define this tragedy. Without institutional support or access to specialized expertise, the search for the wreck remains unresolved.



(37) 60 bodies were washed ashore to Libya, 24 bodies found in Italy and about 54 bodies washed ashore to El Ketef in Tunisia.

Challenges Faced by Families of the Zuwara Shipwreck

The experiences described in the previous sections reveal recurring challenges faced by families in their search for truth, dignity, and closure.

The search for my sister, Maysoon, revealed how complex, fragmented, and often indifferent the systems surrounding missing migrants are. From the start, I was treated with suspicion, as if I were under surveillance. Repeated inquiries to authorities went unanswered, and I had no clear guidance on where to turn. Even organizations I hoped could help, such as the Red Cross, imposed strict limitations: I was forced to communicate only with their Netherlands office, which did not coordinate with offices in other countries, leaving critical information inaccessible.

Before I became closely involved in the search for Maysoon, my brother felt helpless for years. He said:

“Years after the tragedy, we were invited several times by the Red Cross to retell our story, yet we never received any proper information or follow-up from their side. The real problem is that there is no single authority or organization responsible for centralizing information about missing migrants, where, and who survived. Even the small efforts and programs run by some organizations lack sufficient data and coordination. This absence of collaboration creates a huge gap, where valuable information is collected but remains fragmented and inaccessible.”

Jamila has the same experience as my family. Losing her father pushed everyone in the family to search, hoping to find at least a body:

“One of our relatives went to Italy to seek information and request authorization, but no one provided any answers. I personally went to the Red Cross office in Germany, where I gave my testimony and filed a missing person report for him, but I never received any follow-up or update. Our only source of information has been social media. At one point, Nawal an activist based in Italy, posted that around 100 people were being held in Siracusa. Shortly after, she deleted her post, and when we reached out to her, she denied ever publishing it. To this day, we still don't know if that information was true.”

The absence of a centralized system and any real transparency forces families like mine to turn to anyone who might have information, often ending up with rumors or misinformation about their missing loved ones. Families are left alone in a painful limbo, with nowhere specific to turn. Even humanitarian organizations can do little more than document the cases, offering no concrete answers, and in some situations, unintentionally deepening the psychological distress families already endure.

Siwar says:

“ My family did not take any legal steps to search not only because we didn't know where to begin, but because hope was stronger than paperwork.”

Living in hope is often more painful than anything else. Families spend years without closure, without answers. Beyond the struggle of having no information, they are left to face their trauma alone.

My brother has carried the burden of searching, year after year. The absence of answers has drained meaning from his life. He tells me, “I have never forgotten that moment. The feeling of guilt has never left me.”

This personal account from my brother reflects the lasting emotional trauma that continues to affect the families of the missing, even years after the tragedy. A deep sense of guilt is something shared by nearly all families.

Jamila, who lost her father on the same journey, told me:

“Even now, in 2025, I still have crying breakdowns when I’m alone. The feeling of guilt that we, as his family, might have encouraged him to make the trip never leaves me. I haven’t received any psychological support here in Germany; only my family has been my main source of strength.”



This personal struggle reflects a broader reality for families of the shipwreck. Across countries and institutions, families encounter systemic gaps, bureaucratic obstacles, and emotional isolation.

The following challenges summarize the difficulties faced by my family and others in similar situations:

- **Lack of a centralized information system,** No single authority tracks missing migrants, their locations, survival status, or recovered bodies. Families are left to piece together fragmented information from multiple sources, often without verification.



- **Fragmented humanitarian and institutional support,** Small initiatives from NGOs or authorities exist but are under-resourced, poorly coordinated, and inconsistent. Programs often collect some data but fail to share it with other organizations, creating large gaps in knowledge.



- **Repeated recounting without outcomes,** Families are forced to retell their stories multiple times to various organizations, often with no follow-up, no updates, and no actionable results.



- **Cross-border communication barriers,** Survivors and families are scattered across countries. Organizations such as the Red Cross restrict communication to local offices, preventing direct contact with those in other countries who might have critical information.



- **Limited transparency from authorities,** Italian, Libyan, and Tunisian authorities often provide minimal or contradictory information. Many missing persons remain officially unacknowledged, and public reports rarely reflect the full scale of the tragedy.



- **Documentation prioritized over rescue,** Rescue operations sometimes appear to prioritize filming and documentation over immediate lifesaving. Boats may spend hours under observation before any attempt to save those in danger, leaving families to question why such resources failed to recover lives and bodies.



- **Challenges in verifying survivor accounts,** Trauma, inconsistent memories, and delayed reporting make it difficult to establish an accurate timeline of events. Families must navigate incomplete or conflicting testimonies.



- **Emotional and psychological toll,** Families endure grief compounded by bureaucratic indifference, isolation, and the constant uncertainty of not knowing the fate of their loved ones. Even when solidarity exists among affected families, shared grief also highlights the neglect and injustice inherent in these systems.



- **Minimal public or media attention,** Incidents with few recovered bodies attract limited coverage, further marginalizing families and reducing pressure on authorities to act or provide answers.



- **Long-term systemic neglect.** The combined effect of these challenges is that families are left to search indefinitely, navigating complex systems, uncoordinated agencies, and scarce information while enduring profound personal loss.



Together, these challenges form a cycle of uncertainty that extends far beyond the moment of disappearance. Families are left navigating fragmented systems, unresolved grief, and prolonged waiting, often without recognition, support, or clear pathways forward. These experiences shape not only the search for the missing but the lives of those left behind.

Conclusion

The Zuwara shipwreck of 24 August 2014 did not end when the boat capsized. For families, it marked the beginning of a prolonged search shaped by uncertainty, fragmented information, and institutional silence. This report has traced that search from the night of the shipwreck, through testimonies of survivors and families, across borders and bureaucracies, and into the unresolved questions that remain more than a decade later.

The findings presented here are the result of a family-led investigation conducted under severe constraints. In the absence of comprehensive official records, this report relies on testimonies from families and survivors, open-source information, limited engagement with authorities and humanitarian organizations, and firsthand research carried out across multiple countries. These sources vary in completeness and reliability, reflecting the undocumented nature of the journey and the lack of coordinated institutional responses. Where uncertainty exists, it has been acknowledged transparently rather than resolved through speculation.

What emerges is not only the story of one tragedy, but a broader pattern that continues to define the experience of families of missing asylum seekers. Bodies recovered in different countries, unmarked graves, inaccessible records, and the absence of coordinated identification mechanisms have left families suspended between hope and mourning. In the absence of official truth, families have been forced to become investigators,

archivists, and advocates carrying the emotional burden of loss while navigating systems never designed to support them.

The cost of this absence of closure is profound. Families live with enduring grief, guilt, and psychological distress, often without access to adequate support. Daily life is shaped by unanswered questions and by the constant tension between believing that a loved one may still be alive and accepting the possibility of death without proof. Over time, this uncertainty becomes its own form of harm, reproduced by systemic neglect and by the failure to treat missing persons as a priority requiring sustained action.

Yet this report also documents resilience. Through collective organizing, families have refused disappearance as an outcome. Initiatives such as the Association of Families of Missing Asylum Seekers (AFOMAS) represent an effort to reclaim agency, preserve memory, and insist on the right to know. These efforts are not symbolic; they are a response to the vacuum left by institutions and a demand for dignity, accountability, and recognition.

This report is not an endpoint. It is a record of what families have done in the absence of answers, and a reminder that disappearance does not end responsibility. The missing remain missing not only because of the sea, but because systems failed to search, identify, and communicate. Until those failures are addressed, the journey documented here continues.

Accountability and Legal Obligations

The circumstances surrounding the Zuwara shipwreck and its aftermath raise serious concerns regarding the fulfillment of states' legal obligations under international maritime, human rights, and humanitarian law. Italy, Tunisia, and Libya, each connected to this incident through rescue operations, recovered bodies, territorial waters, or burial sites, hold responsibilities that extend beyond the moment of the shipwreck itself.

States have a **duty to rescue and coordinate** when people are in distress at sea. This includes timely intervention, effective coordination between maritime authorities, and the prioritization of saving lives. Where death is suspected, this duty does not end with rescue operations. Authorities are obligated **to search for victims**, recover bodies where possible, and ensure that rescue resources are used to their full capacity³⁸.

States also have a **duty to investigate**, identify the deceased, and involve families throughout the process. This includes documenting all available information, conducting forensic and medico-legal procedures, enabling family participation, notifying relatives upon identification, and returning remains in a dignified manner consistent with families' cultural and religious practices. The absence of DNA testing, the use of unmarked graves, and the lack of accessible records undermine these obligations and deny families their right to truth³⁹.

Effective **cross-border cooperation** is essential in cases where bodies, evidence, and survivors are dispersed across jurisdictions. The Zuwara shipwreck demonstrates how weak information-sharing mechanisms and fragmented institutional mandates prevent meaningful outcomes. Without coordination between states, humanitarian actors, and forensic institutions, identification efforts remain partial, and families are left navigating opaque systems alone⁴⁰.

Finally, states bear responsibility to establish **clear mechanisms and unified contact points** for families of missing persons. Centralized information systems, transparent procedures, and sustained communication are not discretionary measures; they are essential components of states' obligations to protect human dignity and prevent prolonged suffering⁴¹.

The failure to meet these obligations not only affects the past. It shapes the present and future of families who continue to search, and it signals whether similar tragedies will be met with accountability or allowed to fade into obscurity. Addressing the legacy of the Zuwara shipwreck requires more than acknowledgment it requires concrete action to ensure that the missing are searched for, identified, and remembered, and that their families are no longer left alone in the aftermath⁴².

(38) https://euromedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/250828_EN_MigrantsTraveling_EMER.pdf

(39) *ibid*

(40) *ibid*

(41) *ibid*

(42) <https://scm.bz/en/in-search-of-safetythe-syrians-missing-on-asylum-routes-en/>

Photograph 1:



PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE (PROCURA DELLA REPUBBLICA)

at the Court of SIRACUSA

Interagency Group for Combating Illegal Immigration

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Prot.: 302/14 Gicic

Siracusa, 05/11/2015

SUBJECT: P.P. 9005/14 mod. 21 – Service report on activities for the identification of bodies, shipwreck of 24/08/2014, disembarkation of 26/08/2014 at the Commercial Port of Augusta of no. 352 shipwreck survivors and 24 bodies.

**To Dr. Marco DI MAURO
Deputy Public Prosecutor**

IN OFFICE

The undersigned Chief Inspector P.M. Angelo MILAZZO, following the service order of 28/08/2014 issued by the head of the G.I.C.I.C., Deputy Superintendent Carlo PARINI, and pursuant to the delegations of the Deputy Public Prosecutor Dr. Martina BONFIGLIO (Attachments 1, 2 and 3), hereby transmits the outcome of the activities carried out to date, stating that of the 24 bodies, 21 have been identified by family members.

The following three bodies remain to be identified:

Photograph 2:



Syrian Press Center
September 3, 2014

List of missing people in the shipwreck off Zuwara, Libya on 24 August 2014 (All for Syria)

1. Abdulhamid Farouk Al-Saj
2. Khaled Owiti
3. Yasser Yousef Amr
4. Amani Jamal Mreish
5. Aida Asaad Owidat
6. Fadi Jamal Al-Falouji
7. Muhammad Samir Sanoubar
8. Maysoon Karbijha
9. Diaa Tahqafa
10. Rami Al-Dous
11. Kinan Haitham Hijazi
12. Ahmed Al-Damalkhi
13. Ibrahim Al-Damalkhi

Photograph 3:

Documents Found during Recovery of Bodies off Ben Gardane's Coast, Southern Tunisia				
Document Type	Document Number	Document Holder	Date and Place of Birth	
Passport	006286547	Muhammad Muhi Al-Din Al-Muhammad	09-05-1977	Damascus
	003416338	Wassim Muhammad Amin Al-Shouha	01-01-1975	Damascus
	006197792	Hiyam Ahmad Misto	18-02-1978	Rural Damascus
	009291991	Sarah Radwan Al-Hamdi	25-03-1989	Daraa – Syria
	007437631	Rasha Muhammad Adnan Al-Rezz	17-05-1986	Damascus
	007763705	Nada Kamal Al-Din Nawaf	05-10-1985	Rural Damascus
	009322232	Muhammad Jumaa Ashour	04-05-1967	Rural Damascus
	007763706	Omar Muhammad Al-Muhammad	01-02-2011	Rural Damascus
	009291581	Akram Qutaish Al-Jawabra		Unclear
	009291993	Mira Akram Al-Jawabra	08-02-2011	Daraa – Syria
	009291999	Mahmoud Akram Al-Jawabra	18-03-2013	Daraa – Syria
	009291998	Maria Akram Al-Jawabra	14-02-2012	Daraa – Syria
	009291992	Youssef Akram Al-Jawabra	01-07-2014	
	003077467	Kinan Haitham Hijazi	09-11-1988	Damascus - Syria
	0056391311	Hasan Fawaz Al-Radi	01-12-1973	Damascus - Syria
	006640926	Elaf Muhammad Adnan Al-Zoubi	11-07-1979	Daraa – Syria
	004741628	Shadi Muhammad Tariq Marrawi	25-01-1986	Idlib – Syria
WR2752316	Jamal Majidi	01-10-1980	Moroccan National	
Identity Card	12100032644	Wassim Muhammad Amin Al-Shouha	01-01-1975	Damascus
	01010350869	Rasha Muhammad Adnan Al-Rezz	17-05-1986	Damascus
	01010239160	Murad Muhammad Hassan Abdullah	01-01-1993	Latakia – Syria
	03250043296	Hiyam Ahmad Misto	18-02-1978	Al-Muadamiyah – Syria
	03100010763	Jumaa Muhammad Ashour		Rankous – Syria
	01010096776	Kinan Haitham Hijazi	09-11-1988	Damascus – Syria
	01030047319	Osama Farouk Abu Hamza	17-09-1987	Damascus – Syria
	12060054992	Elaf Muhammad Adnan Al-Zoubi	11-07-1979	Al-Yadudah – Syria
	1422218	Jamal Majidi	01-10-1980	Bni Zrantel - Khouribga
Driver License	47585	Muhammad Muhi Al-Din Al-Muhammad	1977	Rural Damascus
	971960	Mahmoud Eid Al-Shanan	1975	Raqqa – Al-Karama – Syria
	421160	Akram Qutaish Al-Jawabra	1976	Daraa – Syria
	72371	Wassim Muhammad Amin Al-Shouha	1975	Damascus – Syria
	2519481	Adnan Kisoum Al-Aswad	27-01-1986	Koura – Lebanon
	80989	Jamal Majidi	1980	Moroccan National
	47676	Kinan Haitham Hijazi	1977	Damascus – Syria
	277722	Osama Farouk Abu Hamza	1987	
	21522	Elaf Muhammad Adnan Al-Zoubi	1979	Al-Yadudah – Syria
	M01 K829270	Musab Muhammad Othman Sabil		Sudanese National
Family Record Book		Muhammad Muhi Al-Din Al-Muhammad	09-05-1977	Damascus
Syrian Ministry of Interior Card (Civil Affairs)	2483991	Ahmad Abd Al-Bay		Al-Muadamiyah – Syria

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A F O M A S
Families Of Missing
Asylum Seekers