

Probe of migrant deaths at Spain's North Africa enclave demanded



Migrants arrive on Spanish soil, crossing the fences separating the Spanish enclave of Melilla from Morocco in Melilla, Spain on Friday?

Madrid, June 25 (RHC)-- Human rights organisations in Spain and Morocco have called on both countries to investigate the deaths of at least 18 sub-Saharan Africans and injuries to dozens of others during attempts to scale the border fence that surrounds the territory of Melilla, a Spanish enclave in North Africa.

Moroccan authorities said the deaths occurred on Friday when a “stampede” of people tried to climb the iron border fence that separates Melilla and Morocco. Morocco’s Ministry of the Interior said 76 people

were injured along with 140 Moroccan security officers.

In a statement published Saturday, the Spanish Commission for Refugees, CEAR, decried what it described as “the indiscriminate use of violence to manage migration and control borders” and expressed concerns that the violence had prevented people who were eligible for international protection from reaching Spanish soil.

The Catholic Church in the southern Spanish city of Malaga also expressed dismay over the events. “Both Morocco and Spain have chosen to eliminate human dignity on our borders, maintaining that the arrival of migrants must be avoided at all costs and forgetting the lives that are torn apart along the way,” it said in a statement penned by a delegation of the diocese that focuses on migration in Malaga and Melilla.

The Moroccan Human Rights Association (AMDH) demanded a “comprehensive, quick and serious enquiry to determine responsibilities and shortcomings”, and warned against burying the bodies of those who died until their deaths had been properly investigated.

AMDH shared videos on social media that appeared to show dozens of people lying on the ground, many of them motionless and a few bleeding, as Moroccan security forces stood over them. In another of the association’s videos, a Moroccan security officer appears to use a baton to strike a person lying on the ground.

“They were left there without help for hours, which increased the number of deaths,” the human rights group said on Twitter. In a statement released late Friday, Amnesty International expressed its “deep concern” over the events at the border.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez described the events at Melilla as an attack on Spain’s “territorial integrity.” Sanchez told journalists in Madrid on Saturday that “if anyone is responsible for everything that happened at the border, it is the mafias that traffic in human beings.”

A spokesperson for the Spanish government’s office in Melilla said that approximately 2,000 people had attempted to make it across the border fence but were stopped by Spanish Civil Guard Police and Moroccan forces on either side of the border fence.

A total of 133 people made it across the border. Spanish officials said 49 Civil Guards sustained minor injuries on Friday.

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