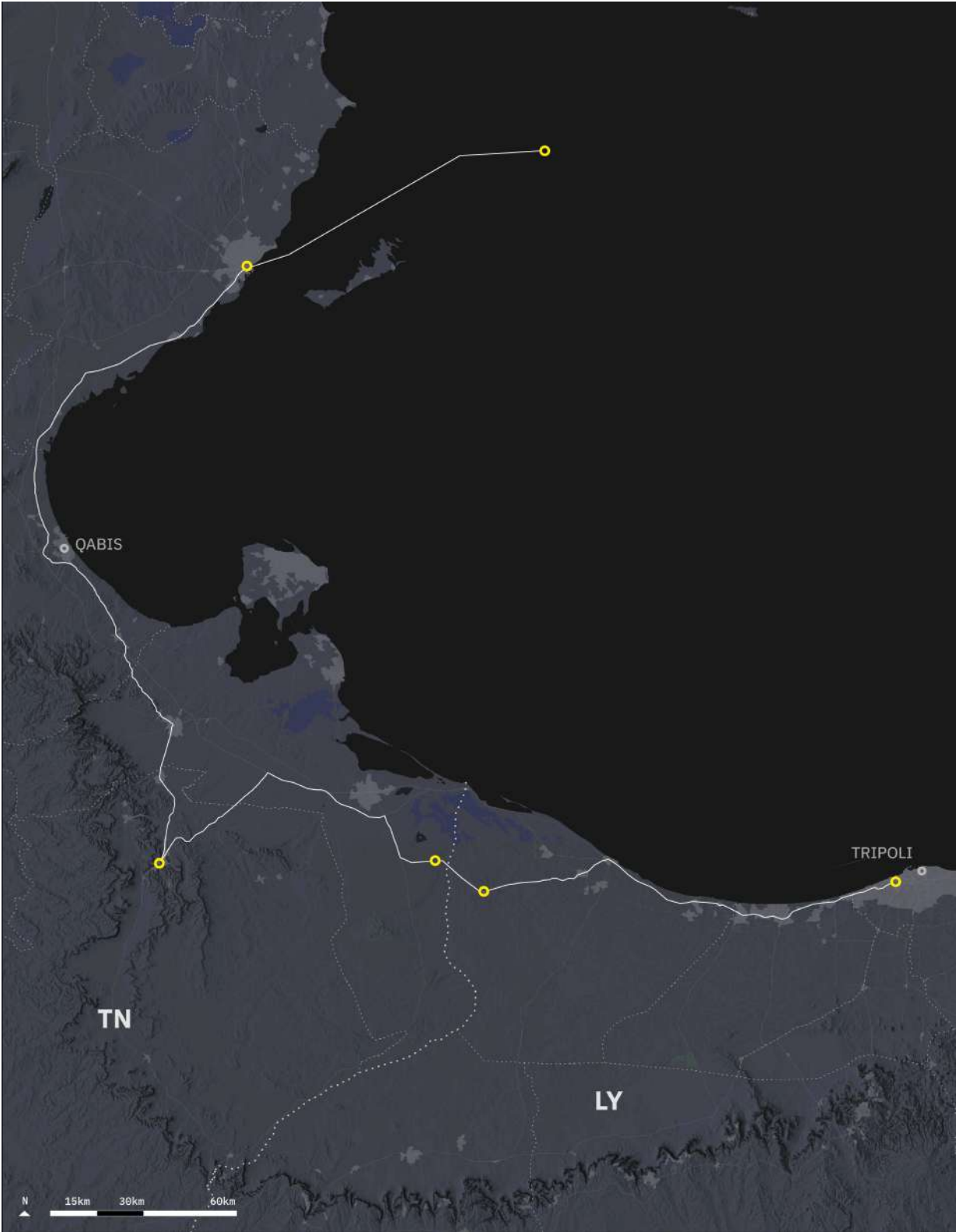


**BORDER FORENSICS FOR "WOMEN STATE TRAFFICKING."  
SPATIAL EXTENSION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE  
EXPULSION AND EXPLOITATION APPARATUS: GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA.**



Within the framework of the research activities for the **Women State Trafficking** project—coordinated by the transnational research group RR[X]—Border Forensics has conducted a spatial analysis and research study (similar to the work done for *State Trafficking*) to verify and corroborate information shared by witnesses and victims.

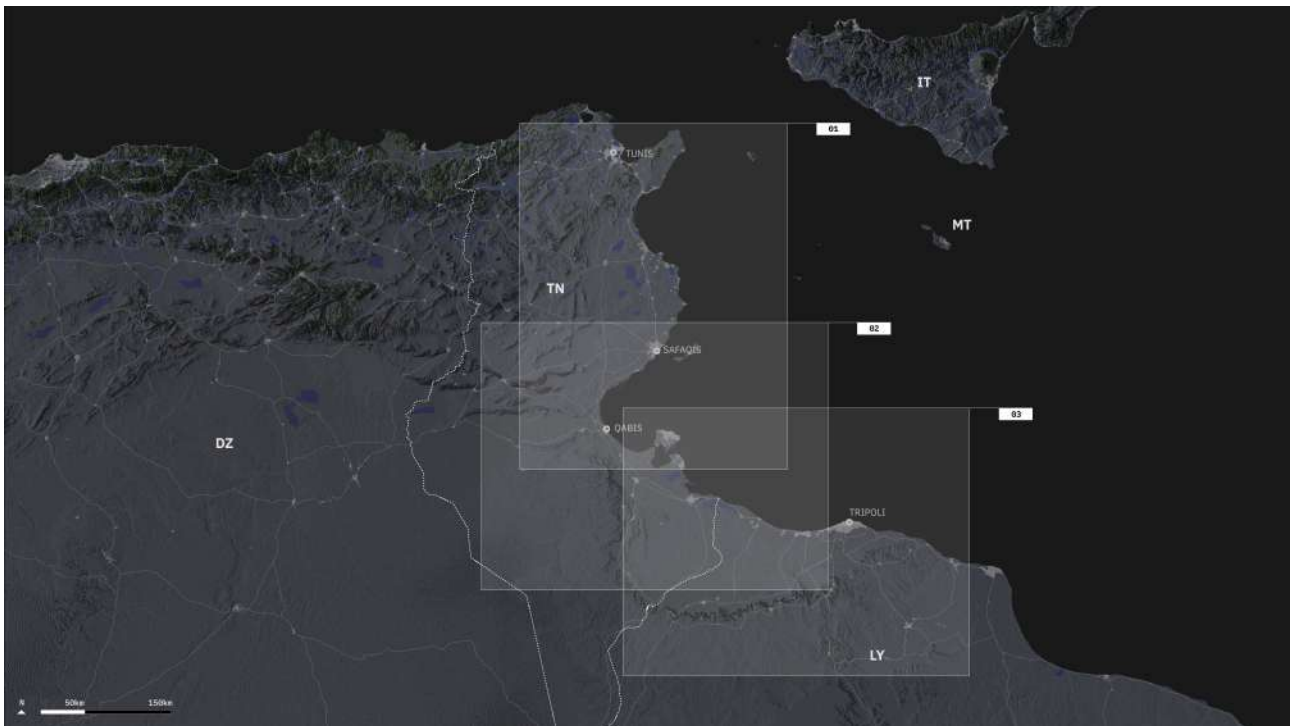
For this specific in-depth study, the research focused on the dimension of **gender-based violence**, reconstructing specific dynamics and trajectories that operate within a systemic apparatus of abuse and human rights violations.

While the first report focused primarily on cases of sale and trafficking at the Tunisia-Libya border, this second volume highlights the **chain of violence** perpetrated throughout the various operational "phases" of the apparatus: from capture in Tunisia to transfer toward the border, and from the sale to the subsequent inclusion in detention and/or exploitation circuits in Libya.

Consequently, the **spatial extension** of this system also emerges; while its core lies along the Tunisian-Libyan border, its ramifications extend from Tunis to Tripoli. The testimonies further reveal a **"differential" use of violence** and the organization of a detention and exploitation system that separates men from women (and children), funneling the latter into specific circuits of labor and sexual exploitation.

## Mapping of Trajectories and Spatial Analysis

To illustrate the spatial extension of the apparatus, BF (Border Forensics) has produced a series of mappings focusing on the three phases of its operation: 1) places of arrest in Tunisia, 2) deportation "routes," and finally 3) places of detention in Libya. This breakdown synthesizes individual and collective trajectories that are far more complex, identifying the moments when major shifts in the witnesses' situations occur (arrest / expulsion-sale / detention-exploitation).



The three sets of maps report the individual experiences of each of the 63 testimonies collected during the *State Trafficking and Women State Trafficking research*, disaggregated by gender, covering a timeframe from mid-2023 to early 2026. As illustrated in the report, these are individual testimonies that must be situated and contextualized within events systematically involving groups of varying sizes, particularly regarding the moments of expulsion and detention. To emphasize the gender perspective of *Women State Trafficking*, a summary (4) of the individual trajectory of capture, detention, and violence experienced by a

female witness (MFD) in mid-October 2025 is also included.

The spatial references in the maps are not individual geolocations, although for some testimonies it is possible to precisely identify the described locations: for capture sites, the zones indicated by witnesses are marked generically.

Similarly, for transit locations and expulsion routes, reference is made to the spatial and geographical indicators witnesses were able to provide despite the progressive "opacity" of the apparatus near the border. For detention sites, more precise localizations emerge, which have allowed—and are currently allowing—for the identification of specific detention facilities.

In addition to the mapping work, BF has developed detailed spatial analyses to further examine the typology and functions of certain spaces described by witnesses. The use of satellite imagery did not allow for the capturing of groups of people "in transit"—as loading/unloading operations are described as expeditious, and people are quickly confined in enclosed spaces that are difficult to identify.

However, it has allowed for the identification and "recognition" of sites described by multiple witnesses, finding spatial elements that confirm the testimonies and, in general, observing traces of activity consistent with that described by the witnesses.



**1) Captures:** The testimonies collected in ST (*State Trafficking*) and WST (*Women State Trafficking*) highlight that the epicenter of hunting and capture activities is located in the **Sfax region** (extending to Jebeniana and El Jem). However, testimonies also report captures in Tunis, Nabeul, Monastir, and Sousse. Numerous captures occur at sea through **interception by the Tunisian Coast Guard**; generally, individuals are disembarked at the port of Sfax to be immediately funneled into the **expulsion circuit**.

Captures are sometimes individual, but often collective, carried out through organized raids in the witnesses' living areas or through interception operations at sea. The territorial dissemination of these operations, their frequency, and the methods described by the witnesses reflect the systemic organization of the capture apparatus, which appears to extend throughout the entire country.



The port of Sfax and the disembarkation area for people intercepted at sea.

The testimonies collected for WST highlight a continuity in the methods and functioning of the capture and expulsion apparatus, consistent with the findings reported in ST.

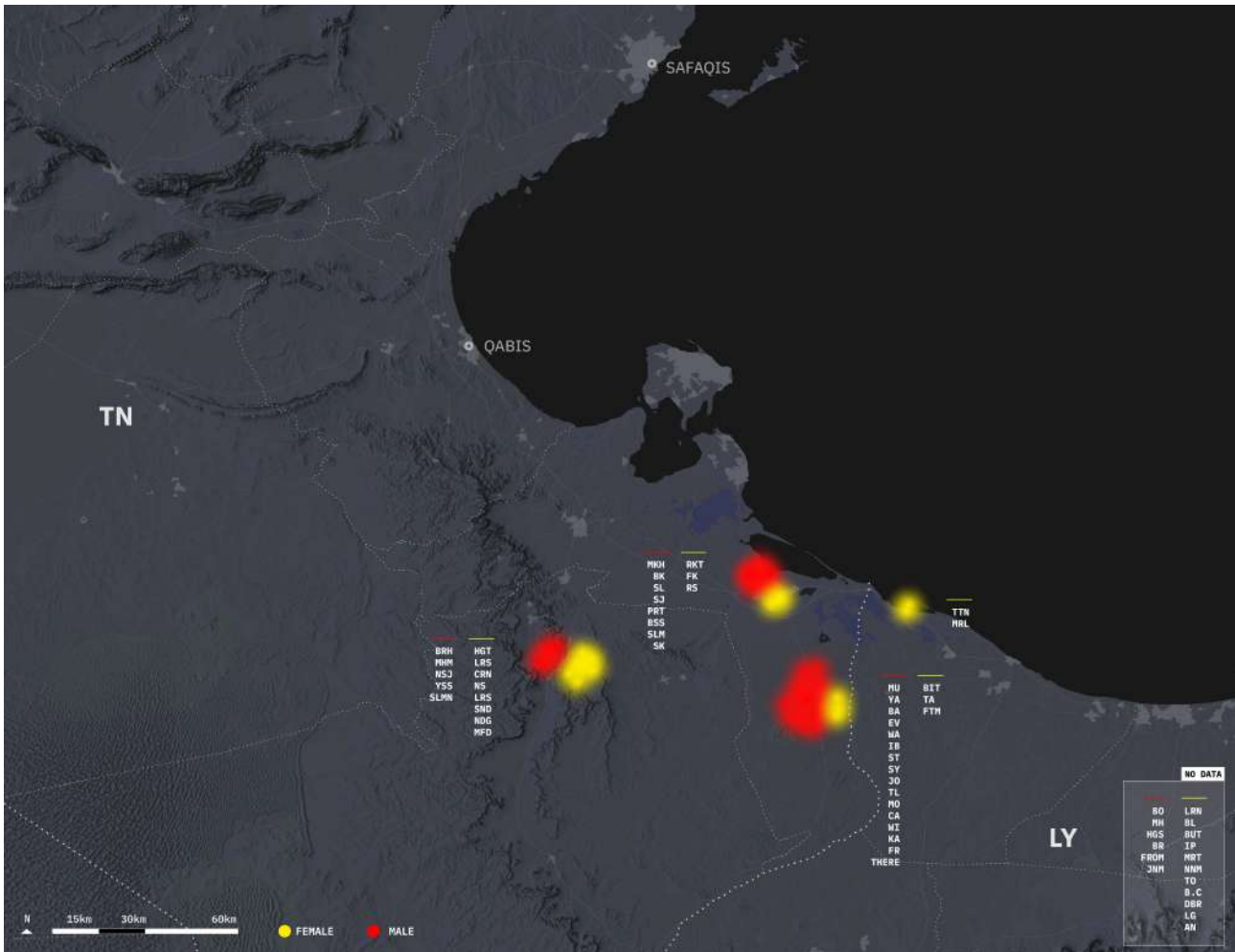
A deeper analysis of the logistical dimension during the collection of testimonies has, on one hand, further emphasized the widespread nature of the apparatus—which mobilizes state actors throughout the entire territory—and, on the other, the persistence of a mechanism for the assembly and collective transport toward the south, which appears to have the port of Sfax as its nerve center.



**2) Expulsion Routes:** In the first report, the main expulsion route –identified also through video evidence–is the one leading from Sfax to the proximity of the Libyan border, passing through the area east of the **C203 road**. In this area, a system of military outposts/barracks has been developed; according to testimonies, these facilities are used to detain individuals awaiting transit toward Libya.



The border area east of the **C203 road** and near **Al Assah** (above) and the primary transit locations of the witnesses (below).



In the second report, numerous testimonies identified the **El Meguissem barracks/compound** as a critical transit node while awaiting handover to the Libyans. At El Meguissem (32°58'48.79''N 11°27'23.34''E) – where one of the "cages" mentioned in the previous report was also located—certain buildings adjacent to the barracks were identified by witnesses as additional detention spaces during transit and sale operations. Specifically, one witness, using public satellite imagery (Google Earth), illustrated the dynamics of detention and transport toward the border: [https://statetrafficking.net/State-trafficking\\_03.mp4](https://statetrafficking.net/State-trafficking_03.mp4). The duration of stay in these transit facilities is typically very short; however, in some cases, witnesses report stays ranging from two weeks to a month. The landscape consistently shows evidence of intense activity and heavy vehicle circulation.









Based on the video testimony reported above, we can follow the unpaved road that, starting from the **El Meguissem barracks** and heading east, reaches a crossing point through the sand "trench"/ditch identified by the witness as one of the exchange locations.



The fundamental role of **El Meguissem**, given its proximity to **Al Assah** on the Libyan side, had already been identified in 2023 and persists in 2025. However, a deeper investigation into the logistical dimension during recent interviews has revealed a more complex articulation of expulsion routes, involving temporary transit through facilities located at key hubs such as **Medenine, Tataouine, or Ben Gardane**.

While the primary function of this multiplication of transit spaces (located near major urban centers) appears to be feeding the route toward El Meguissem and Al Assah, the analysis has identified a series of ramifications/bifurcations that fuel other expulsion trajectories. In particular, a facility (not yet localized) has emerged in Tataouine used for temporary transit, which sorts prisoners either toward Al Assah (to the east) or southward, toward the **Dehiba/Wazzin crossing** or toward Algeria.

This multiplication of routes further illustrates the systemic dimension under denunciation. Compared to the first report, it could be hypothesized that the Tunisian apparatus has progressively evolved and expanded, multiplying and diversifying expulsion routes, also in relation to the **"negotiation" dynamics** between Tunisian and Libyan actors.

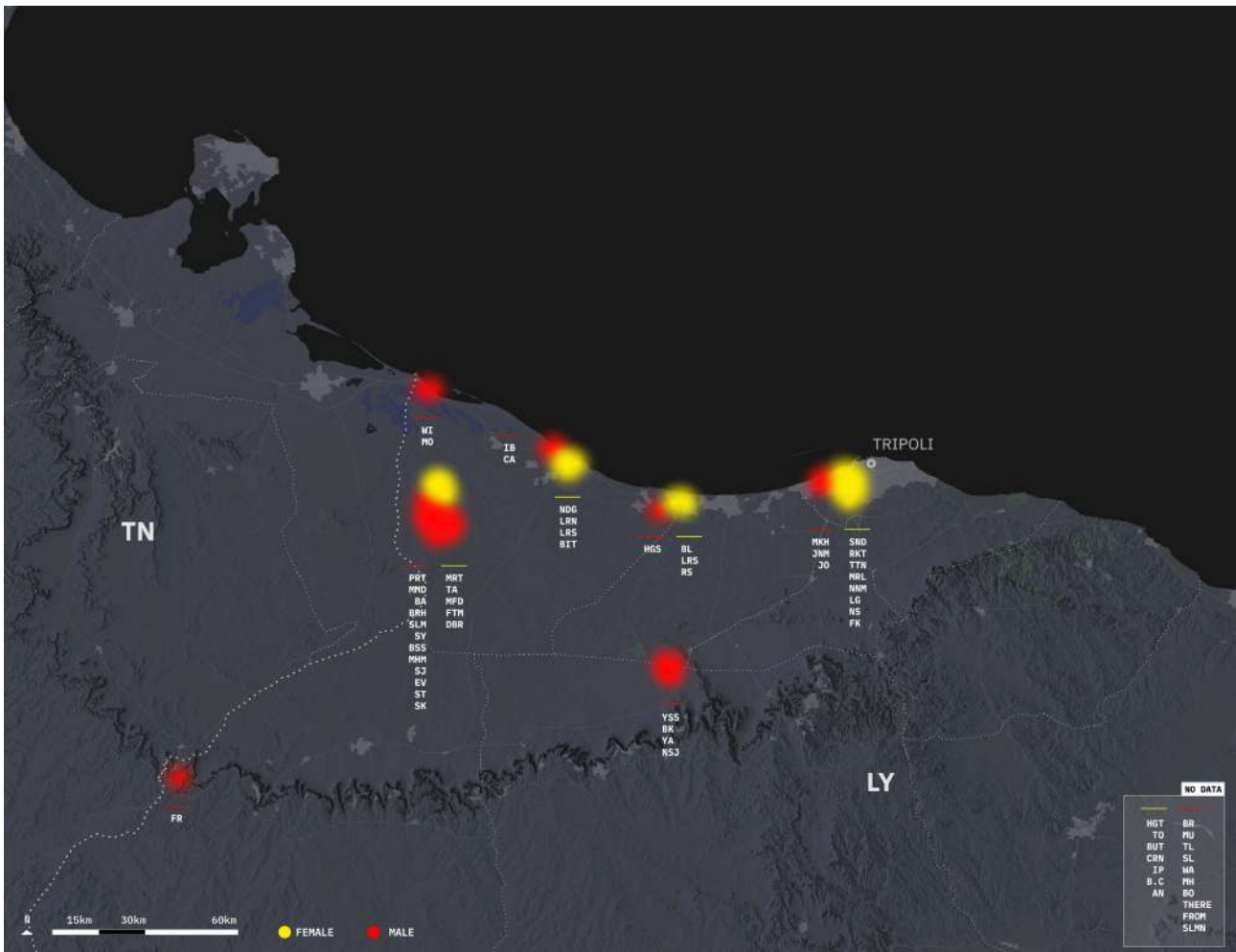
An additional element that emerges is the increasing difficulty for witnesses to "orient themselves" during transfers. Often blindfolded, deprived of phones, and transported in enclosed vehicles, they find it difficult to provide clear spatial points of reference. The use of **commercial transport vehicles** (such as livestock trucks) contributes to making expulsion operations even less transparent. The transit sites in Ben Gardane and Tataouine appear more anonymous and harder to identify compared to the El Meguissem barracks.

Overall, a progressive **"opacity" of the apparatus** is emerging, reducing the witnesses' ability to situate themselves in space during these operations. Consequently, this hinders the possibility of following spatial traces and reconstructing trajectories in detail; these are often partially "deduced" and reconstructed a posteriori starting from the detention sites in Libya. In a sense, as it nears the border, the apparatus becomes less "legible," causing the witnesses' tracks to be lost, only for them to reappear later within detention structures in Libya.

A further evolution of the apparatus—though we are currently unable to determine whether it constitutes a systematic "route" or an isolated occurrence—is represented by a **"maritime" route** that had not yet been documented. Two witnesses report having been disembarked by the Tunisian Coast Guard directly onto Libyan territory, in the coastal area of **Abu Kammash**, in March 2025. While collaboration between Tunisian and Libyan naval assets has already been described in other investigations and research, this specific case would represent a form of **direct cooperation** that further illustrates the collusion between Tunisia and Libya in capture and deportation operations.



3) **Detention in Libya:** The testimonies collected for the WST report confirm the persistent centrality of the **Al Assah area** as the epicenter for the collection, detention, and sorting of individuals arriving from Tunisia.

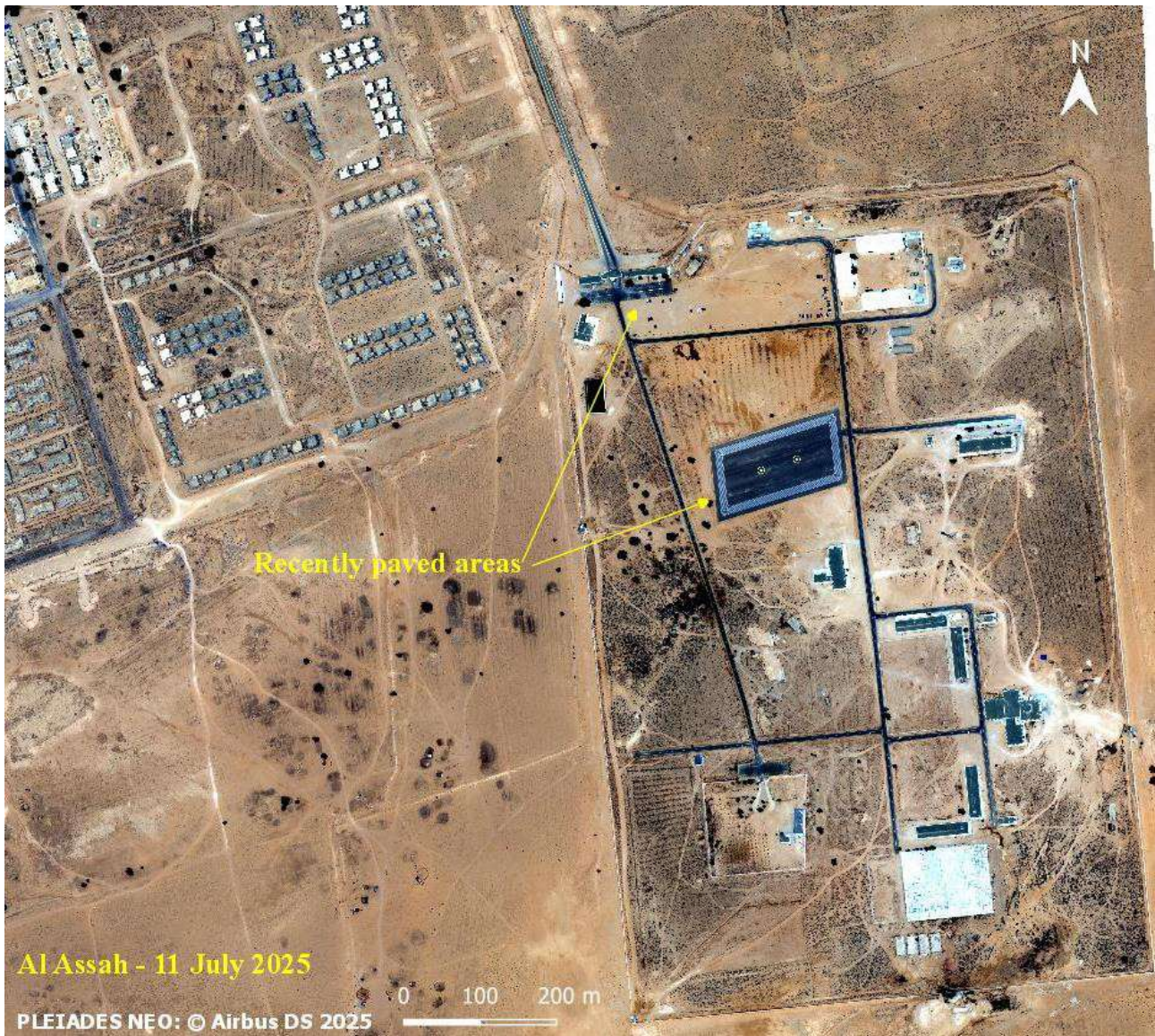


A significant number of testimonies confirm being transported to **Al Assah** and remaining there for varying lengths of time before being moved elsewhere or "released" into the desert: *"It's not far from the Tunisian border, it's in the middle of the desert. So, if you don't have the means to pay the money to get out of that prison, when they see you have only a week left before you die, they let you out and leave you to go. Yes. That's something, isn't it? But as soon as you move, you won't get anywhere, you'll die. That's how it happens."*

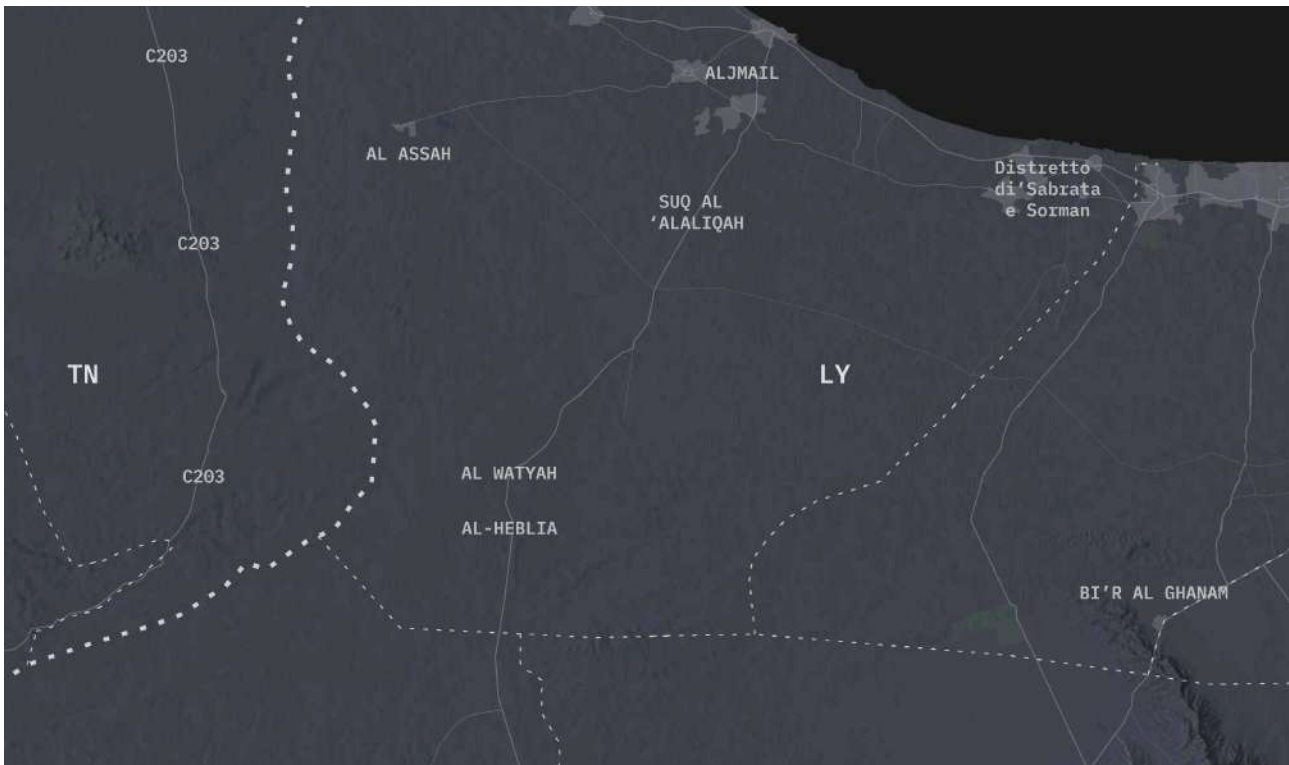


Some witnesses identify a detention center in the middle of the settlement, which appears to be the "entry" point into **Al Assah** ( $32^{\circ} 49' 45.50$  N  $11^{\circ} 37' 40.86''$  E). However, the structural function of Al Assah as a detention and sorting hub—historically a military camp—is consistent with the progressive development in recent years of additional structures that appear to be designed for the concentration and containment of individuals.





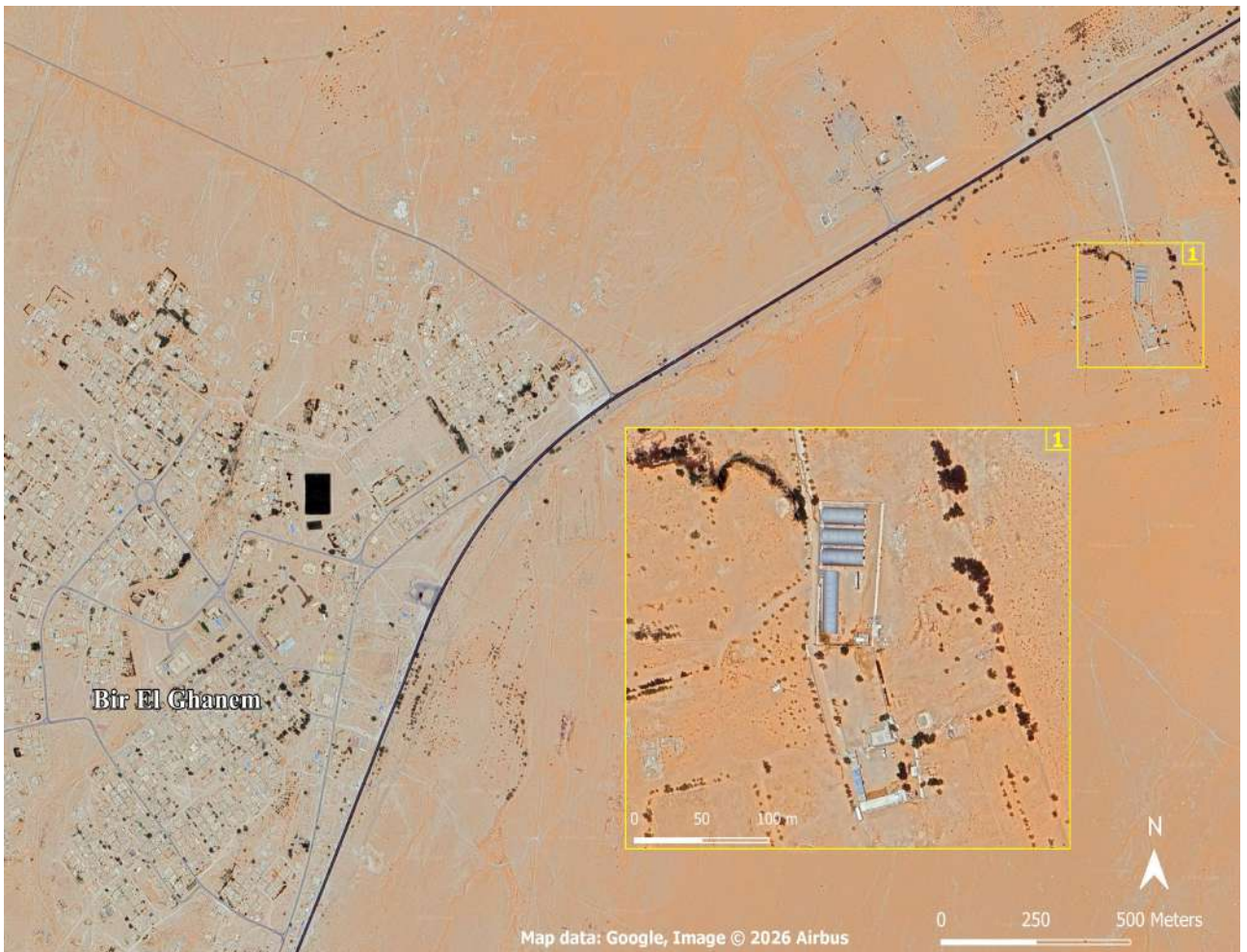
Beyond Al Assah, an additional system of **differential detention** unfolds within a context of violence and abuse described in the report. As the collected testimonies highlight, individuals are separated at Al Assah and assigned to distinct places of detention or exploitation. Specifically, recent testimonies indicate that women are generally sent toward detention centers or sale locations in the **Tripoli region** (with specific reference to a detention site not yet precisely identified, referred to as "**CharaCharah**"), while a portion of the men is sent toward the **Bir El Ghanem prison** (to the southeast).



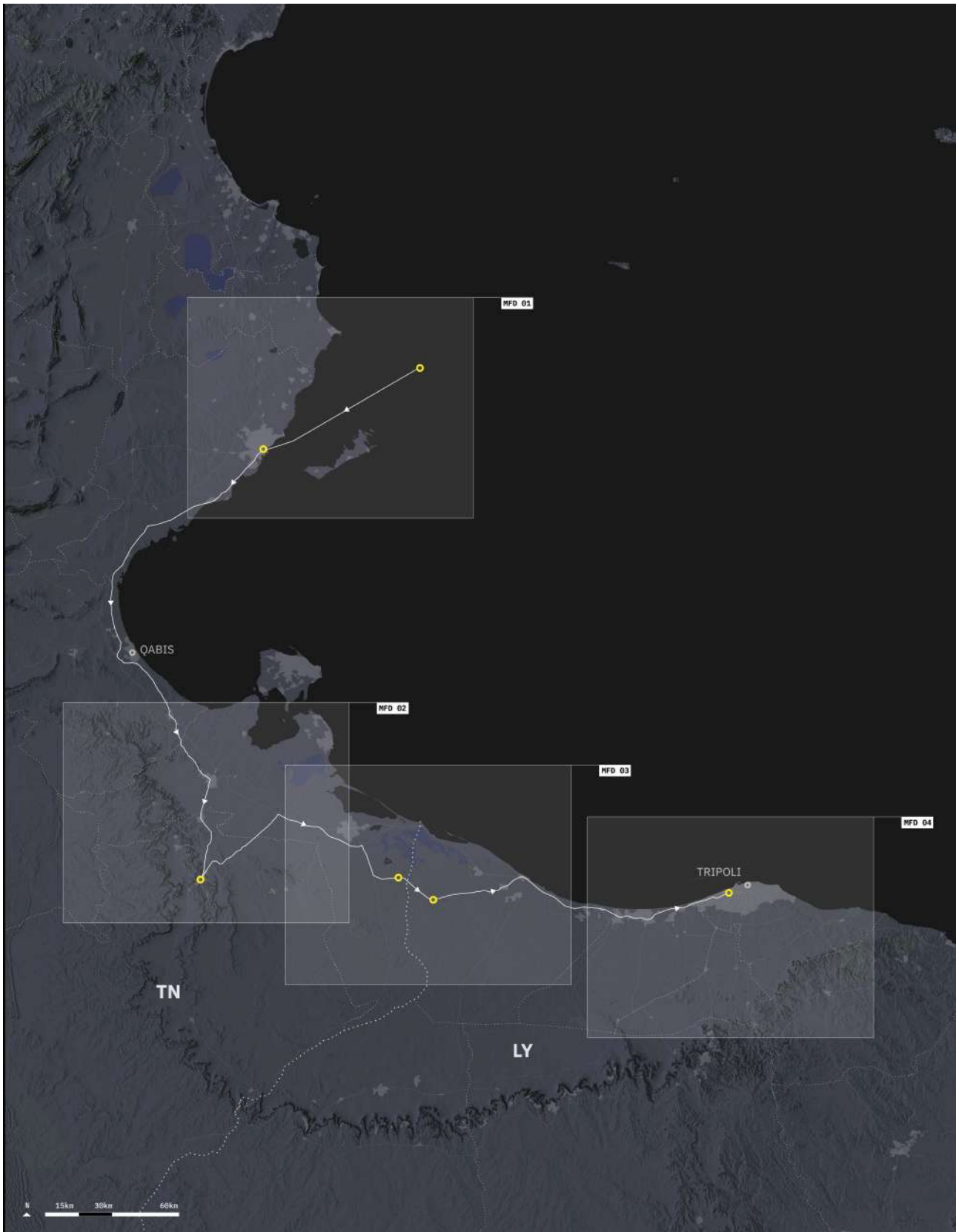
Some of the detention centers mentioned by witnesses are already infamously known to humanitarian actors working in the region; other sites appear to be relatively new structures or have been recently repurposed for the detention of migrants. While the majority of detention centers are located along the coast between **Zuwara, Zawiya, and Tripoli**, the interviews suggest that the use of the Bir El Ghanem prison is becoming increasingly frequent.

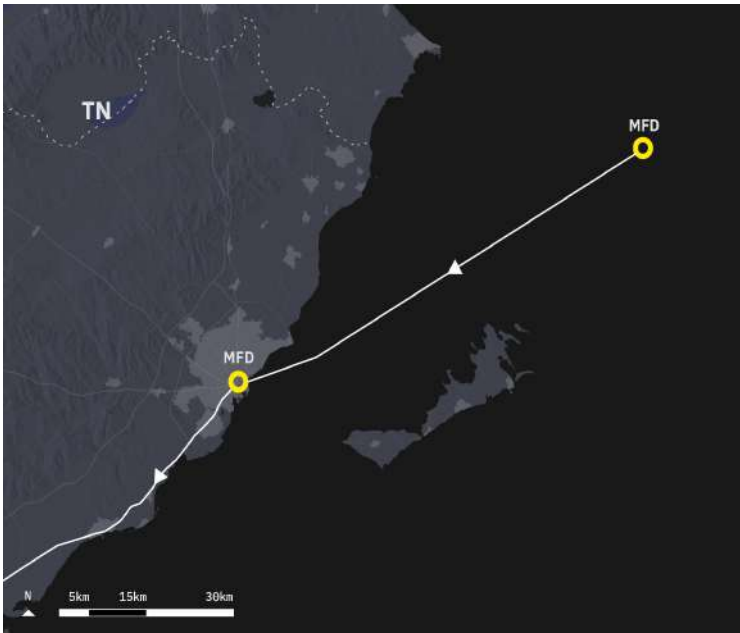
The image extracted from a video recorded by a detained person allows for the clear identification of the specific structure of the hangars used for detention in Bir El Ghanem.





4) "MFD": An individual trajectory of capture, detention, violence, and exploitation. The testimony of MFD describes the various stages of the apparatus's functioning, characterized by a succession of violent acts that she either suffered personally or witnessed.



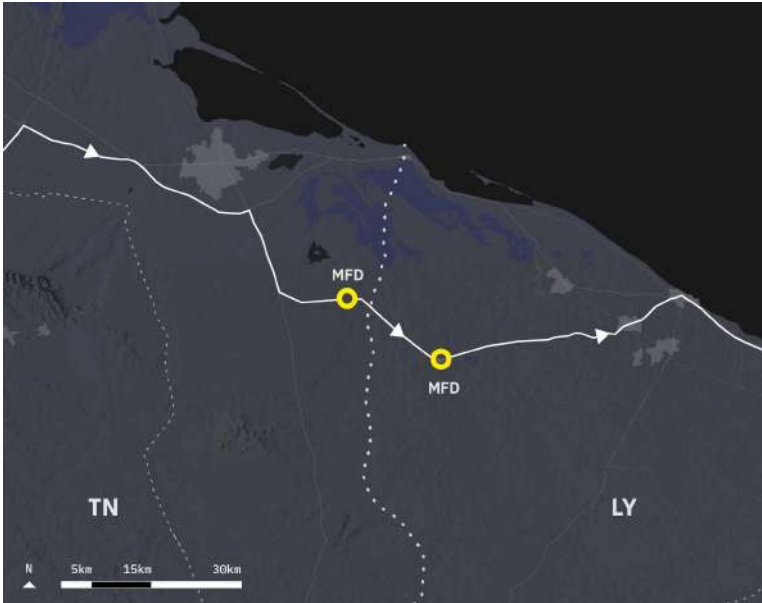


- On October 19, 2025, a boat carrying 42 people was intercepted by the Tunsian Coast Guard, causing a shipwreck. Only 26 survived.

- Disembarkation at the port of Sfax, where many other people are crowded together. Beatings and physical violence. Five buses loaded with prisoners depart south.

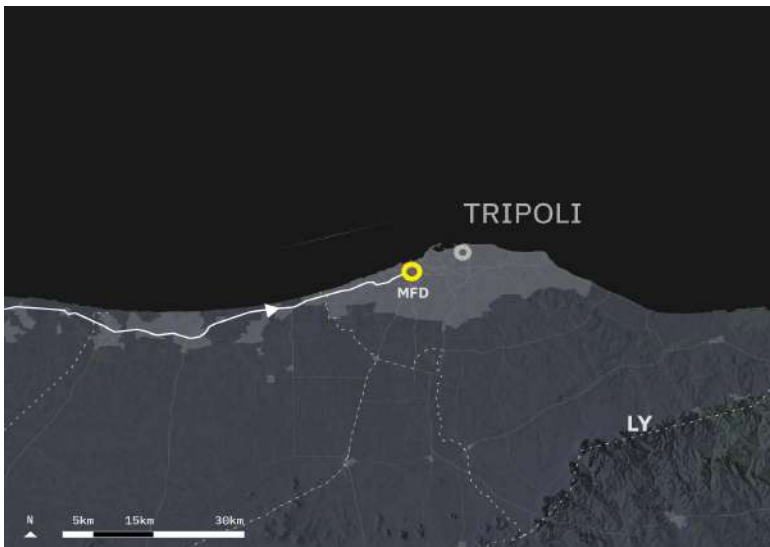


- Stop in Tataouine. Change of escort. Physical violence. Three buses leave, according to witnesses, in the direction of Algeria, two heading towards the Libyan border.



- Exchange/delivery at the border. Transfer to Libyan vehicles.

- Detention for 5 days in Al Assah. Lack of treatment. Physical violence and sexual abuse. Separation of men, women, and children.

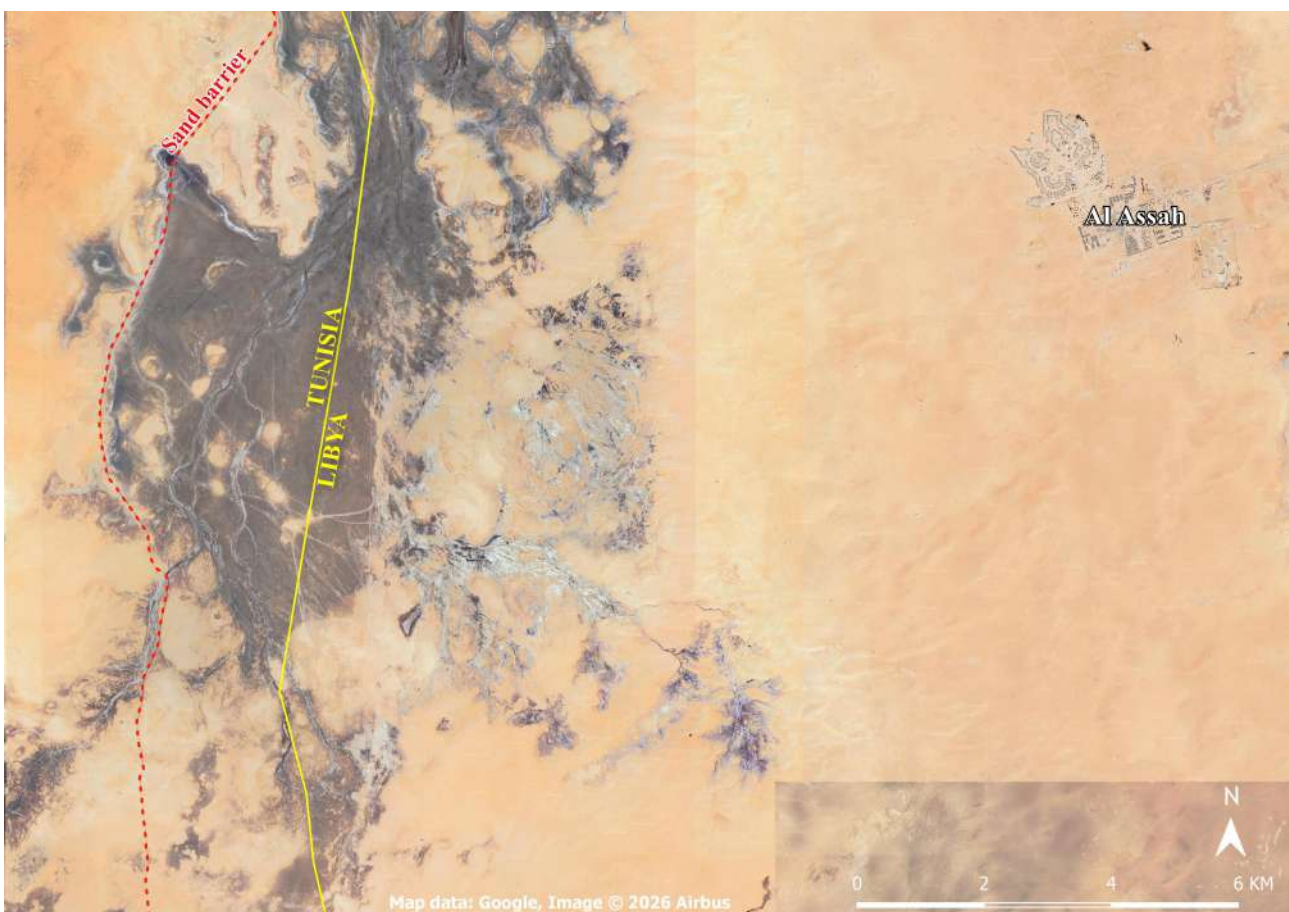


- The men are transferred to Bir el Ghanem. The women are transferred to a prison called « CharaCharah », where they are placed in exploitation networks.

**5) Missing: Mass graves and concealment of corpses.** The testimonies collected systematically contain references to deaths (resulting from direct violence and deprivations suffered) or summary executions—both individual and collective—of people attempting to evade control and detention, both in Libyan and Tunisian territory. Some witnesses reported being forced to bury the bodies of other deceased migrants in collective graves, though they were unable to provide precise information regarding the location of these mass graves.

Based on the descriptions and the dynamics illustrated, it is plausible that bodies are concealed in an **expedient manner** (via burial or by being thrown into crevices/natural pits, depending on the terrain) in the desert areas along the border, near the main unpaved tracks (bodies are transported from the sites of detention/death via pickup trucks).

Through satellite imagery, it has not been possible to precisely identify any of these locations, due both to the **opacity of the apparatus** near the border and the nature of the landscape, along with the objective difficulty of detecting such sites with the means at our disposal. However, one particularly violent testimony—where the victim, presumed dead, was thrown into one of these "holes" along with other corpses but managed to escape during the night—suggests that at least one grave may be located close to the border line and not far from a paved road (in Tunisian territory, presumably the **C203**). It was on this road that, after several hours of walking, the victim was picked up by a vehicle and transported north (to Sfax and later Tunis).



**Conclusions:** The spatial analysis conducted for WST continues the work carried out for ST, highlighting how the apparatus of capture, expulsion, trafficking, and detention between Tunisia and Libya remains operational and appears to have further developed and diversified. A specific focus on the logistical and spatial dimensions during the WST research has made it possible to demonstrate, on one hand, how the apparatus operates and extends throughout the entire Tunisian territory (with Sfax as its epicenter), with certain routes remaining preferential while others appear to be "opening up," particularly toward the south and along the coastline.

On the other hand, the in-depth analysis of gender-based violence has highlighted how this same apparatus—specifically on the Libyan side following the "sale" phase—is organized according to a logic of separation and "selection" of prisoners. These individuals are then funneled into differential circuits of detention or exploitation: specifically, women—victims of seamless physical, sexual, and psychological violence throughout the entire trafficking chain—are integrated into systemic circuits of labor and sexual exploitation.

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