

Nothing to see here

Julian Delia



A year after the brutal murder of Lassana Cisse in a drive-by shooting in Hal Far committed by two former AFM soldiers, the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) declared that an internal inquiry had found no signs of racism within its ranks. Two years after Cisse's murder, which was ostensibly motivated by racial hatred given that neither of the shooters knew anything about the victim except his skin colour, the report remains a secret.

To this day, Malta's public does not know what questions were asked of 300 members of the AFM, nor the content of their answers; we just know the official narrative put forward by the Ministry for Home Affairs. The public was told that the soldiers interviewed denied any knowledge of racist sentiment among their colleagues, and that no affiliations with extremist groups bearing such ideologies were reported.

The problem is that, both before and after Cisse's murder, several other authorities that have no keen, obvious interest in exonerating themselves have reported racist incidents.


In March 2021, the Council of Europe's torture committee delegation, forced to make its way to the island after humanitarian NGOs were denied access to detention centres 'due to COVID regulations', decried our detention system as inhumane, arbitrary, and illegal. Problems with systemic racism extend beyond the AFM; detention centre officers have been repeatedly singled out for their cruel mistreatment of migrants who desperately land on our shores. A May report published by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights features interviews with asylum seekers in Malta, one of whom claimed that guards urged suicidal migrants to 'go ahead and kill themselves'.

Malta's government has repeatedly defended its horrifying regime of detaining and dehumanising migrants, with additional obstacles for those who manage to obtain a residency and find work. It is clear that our authorities have failed to build a humane system that prioritises lives over populism, or over hard-line stances designed to strong-arm the

EU into better burden-sharing. Unless our approach changes, we risk facing a mass graveyard at the bottom of our seas.

A resolution to the migration problems faced by Malta and other EU member states requires multi-layered approaches over the course of generations. Issues directly related to systemic racism in the country need to be tackled through better social education, community outreach programs, and by de-platforming racist policies to instead promote solidarity and inclusion.

The road to resolving migration is a long one, and it begins with acknowledging that the Western world directly profits from instability in the African continent. This profiteering leads to the exploitation of natural resources as well as the displacement of migrants, who leave their country and end up boosting European economies with cheap labour. Over \$41 billion in wealth is extracted from the African continent every year via tax evasion, illegal resource extraction, and questionable debt-financing practices.

In reality, there are many hidden horrors within our institutions and in the countries of origin where migrants come from that need to be seen, and there is even more to do in terms of properly inquiring as to how things have gone so wrong. The independent investigation of our army and security institutions is just the tip of the iceberg. 

Further Reading

Council of Europe. (2020). Report to the Maltese Government on the visit to Malta carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680a1b877>

Martin, I. (2020). AFM inquiry finds no sign of racism in the army. Times Of Malta. Retrieved 8 June 2021, from <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/afm-inquiry-finds-no-sign-of-racism.794081>