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Centre

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# Indifference and impunity

## 10 months on, Saudi border killings of migrants continue

Almost 10 months after damning human rights reports and global publicity exposed Saudi Arabian state-driven [border killings of migrants](#) – labelled by [Human Rights Watch](#) as possible crimes against humanity – the deaths and injuries continue. New evidence appears to indicate that the Saudi border authorities at their southern border with Yemen are continuing to use live weapons to fire indiscriminately at Ethiopians and Yemenis crossing the border irregularly. This update report argues that while the crimes being committed are murderous and grievous, the level of inaction and impunity in the face of global exposure and condemnation should also disturb us all.

# Key findings

- Since the Saudi border killings were exposed in 2022 and 2023 there has been widespread but short-lived media coverage and apparent outrage.
- International follow-up and or censure of Saudi Arabia has been limited, restrained and short-lived.
- It appears there have been no promised investigations and no processes of accountability.
- 10 months on, nothing has changed: migrants are still killed and injured on a significant scale.
- Overall, Saudi treatment of migrants at the border, in detention and during deportation attracts deep concern from human rights organisations.
- The cynical dynamics of geopolitical strategic interests and Realpolitik appear again to trump human rights.

## Alarming revelations – background

Agencies like the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and others monitoring violations against migrants using the 'Eastern route' from the Horn of Africa (primarily Ethiopia) to Saudi Arabia have been aware, for some years, that migrants' encounters with Saudi border authorities could involve beatings, sexual violations, detention and eventually deportation.<sup>1</sup> But research indicated an alarming change in recent years.

While conducting research with returnee migrants in Ethiopia in 2022 to establish how many migrants went missing and the prevalence of human trafficking along the Eastern route, **mention of deaths and injuries along the Saudi/Yemen border appeared repeatedly in migrants' testimonies.** Deaths, disappearances, ill health and accidents often linked to neglect, extortion and exploitation at the hands of smugglers and traffickers as well as armed forces is endemic to the Eastern route.

Recent reports such as [Captive Commodities](#) (2023) and [Transit in Hell](#) (2023) document the unending, harrowing experiences of Ethiopian migrants in transit along this route in detail, as did reports going back more than a decade, like the 2019 Human Rights Watch report [Hostile Shores](#) and the 2012 RMMS (MMC's predecessor) report [Desperate Choices](#). But **death and maiming from deliberate and direct explosive fire from high calibre weapons fired by Saudi border guards is an extraordinary and, up to 2022, an unreported and unique abuse along the Eastern route.**

While such extreme revelations were new to many, the Yemen-based *Mwatana for Human Rights* had been collecting similar testimony of deliberate Saudi firing and bombardment of migrant collection areas inside Yemen,

but close to the border, since 2019. A dedicated chapter (Chapter 1) in their [2023 report](#) documents multiple eyewitness reports of indiscriminate attacks by 'Saudi border guards and Saudi/United Arab Emirates (UAE)-led coalition forces' on migrants while still inside Yemen between 2019-2023. However, the border-crossing migrants who were killed were not only Ethiopians but many were Yemeni. In some cases, forensic reports on Yemeni bodies returned by Saudi authorities to Yemeni morgues documented extensive torture before death.

## First formal allegations

As early as August 2022, a little-known media outlet *Saudi Leaks*, [reported](#) that the IOM accused the Saudi authorities of committing several massacres on the Yemeni border against African migrants by targeting them for direct killing with artillery and heavy machine guns. IOM partners and the local community reported that between January and August of 2022 more than 1,000 migrants had been injured or killed due deliberate targeting. No media or rights agency picked up this news release.

Subsequently, in early October 2022, several Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups of the United Nations issued a [communication](#) to highlight allegations of **cross-border artillery shelling and small arms fire. This was allegedly perpetrated by Saudi security forces causing the deaths of up to 430 and injuring 650 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers,** in Sa'dah governorate, Yemen, and Jizan province, Saudi Arabia, between 1 January and 30 April 2022. The communication made allegations of "[a systematic pattern of large-scale, indiscriminate cross-border killings, using artillery shelling and small arms fired by Saudi security forces against migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, and victims of trafficking.](#)" Using snipers and mortars, individuals as well as larger groups of migrants were reportedly targeted. Shockingly, [it reported](#) the possibility of a "clandestine cemetery" in north Yemen near the Saudi border (Al Raqw) containing the remains of up to 10,000 migrants.

The Saudi government took five months to [formally refute](#) the UN's October accusations in writing and the issue seemed to not evolve beyond a cul-de-sac diplomatic exchange. This time, Human Rights Watch issued a [short dispatch](#) and there was some coverage in November 2022 in Arabian news outlets [Ansarollah](#) and [Al Mayadeen](#). Otherwise, investigative journalists, media and other rights organisations did not publicly react, neither did any nation state publicly condemn Saudi Arabia.

1 In recent years, on average over 90 per cent of those using the Eastern route are from Ethiopia, a smaller per centage are from Somalia and some from Eritrea

## Allegations confirmed

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, urgent new data collection was taking place focused on these allegations. The result was the release of a short report by MMC in early July 2023, bluntly titled [Murderous border controls](#). MMC reported that **an estimated 794 Ethiopian migrants were killed and 1,703 injured by Saudi security forces in 2022**, and 75 were killed and 226 injured between January and April 2023. Then, on the 21st August, the Human Rights Watch published their detailed and authoritative, [“They Fired on Us Like Rain” Saudi Arabian Mass Killings of Ethiopian Migrants at the Yemen-Saudi Border](#). Both studies collected multiple eye-witness accounts and emphatically confirmed the UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups allegations. They also found that the border killings were continuing, involving far larger figures than previously mentioned and revealing that the use of live ammunition was inherent to the Saudi’s border management policy. Human Rights Watch found unequivocally that **“Saudi border guards have used explosive weapons and shot people at close range, including women and children, in a pattern that is widespread and systematic. If committed as part of a Saudi government policy to murder migrants, these killings would be a crime against humanity.”** Meanwhile, the Saudi regime was [fast to deny](#) and deflect the reports describing them as “unfounded and based on unreliable sources”. Further, the regime “denounced the raising of false accusations by some organisations about the Kingdom and the publication and promotion of politicised and misleading reports”.

## Instant media interest

The MMC report from July 2023 received a bit more media coverage than the October 2022 UN communication, with a [couple of articles](#), highlighting it, in addition to Dutch national television covering it in an [evening news show](#), but the shocking revelations were still not widely covered. However, full credit to Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) global reputation and reach, once their August report was released **the media interest in these atrocities skyrocketed, but only very briefly**. In the ten days after the release of the HRW report on the 21st August approximately 137 English speaking news reports featured their findings. Presumably additional articles were also published in local language news globally. At least 80 media articles were published on the actual day of the HRW report release, with a further 49 in the week after and 8 after September 1st. The press reports were damning and unambiguous echoing the tone of the HRW findings.

Additionally, over 30 [YouTube](#) films or clips of news features and ‘interviews with experts’ can be found online – again, also almost all released immediately after the HRW report. Some print media subsequently followed up with articles about the Ethiopian government’s claim to [conduct investigations](#) as well as possible [links](#) between [German](#) and [US military training](#) of border guards, as well as [Australia’s possible sale of weapons](#) that may have

been used by the Saudi border guards to kill migrants. But **beyond this short-lived media storm, there has been virtual silence**. But far more shocking than the silence, our investigations show, **the Saudi border strategy is unchanged. The killings continue**.

## Ten months on – at ground level

Sources working inside Yemen who have contact with migrants and agencies working with migrants have informed MMC that the deaths and injuries continue. Hospitals in migrant areas state that **casualties from border violence continue to arrive**.

Unlike the 2023 Murderous Border Controls publication, MMC has no access to updated and current figures of the number of migrant deaths or injuries at Yemen’s border with Saudi Arabia. However, MMC has received testimony from returned migrants in Ethiopia who passed through the border or were returned from the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border after the end of August 2023 when HRW launched its report. To be clear, these returnees were interviewed in April 2024 but had experience with the Yemen / Saudi border as irregular migrants between September 2023 and March 2024 – i.e. after the international exposure and condemnation of earlier border killings; they were selected to ensure we would get an updated picture on whether anything changed since then.

Reflecting on the testimony from recently interviewed returnees, certain conclusions may be drawn – also corroborated by previously reported testimonies from the studies mentioned above:

Saudi police and border guards arrest migrants in large numbers if they cannot deter them by gunfire. Once caught they are either sent back to Yemen immediately (‘pushbacks’) or rounded up and taken to Saudi jails and eventually (sometimes after many months) deported to Ethiopia. During this detention process migrants have reported beatings, sexual abuse and torture before enduring the dire conditions of Saudi prisons.

**“They don’t always intend to kill illegal migrants unless they make an attempt to flee or refuse to return to Yemen. Since their jails are overflowing with migrants, the majority of what Saudi Police do to the illegal migrants is simply send them back to Yemen. However, the Yemeni kidnappers around the**

border capture the migrants and sell them to the brokers again.”

**21-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia**

While the killing of migrants crossing the border continues, Saudi border guards also appear to want to scare Ethiopian migrants back into Yemen when they open fire on them or address them through loudspeakers. However, as live rounds and larger munitions are used there are deaths and injuries, not only from bullets and shrapnel but also rock fragments splintering through dense groups of migrants and from migrants falling down rock faces into gulleys and valleys.

“...unfortunately, they identified us. After a while, we were caught by the camera, and they opened gunfire on us three times from directions. Everybody fell down to the valley, and many were injured. Some females fainted, but nobody died.”

**25-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia**

“They yelled at us through the speaker, telling us to sit down or else they would wipe out us all. We all went straight over to them and surrendered ourselves. If you attempt to flee, they shoot you. All 600 of us were taken into custody. Instead of beating us, they told us that they would deport us to Yemen, warning that if we returned, they would destroy us. We travelled back to Yemen for a full day after they sent us on our way [and then attempted to cross the border again].”

**25-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia**

Saudi border guards continue to use powerful weapons, surveillance systems and automated firing systems along parts of the border and continue to kill migrants who are trying to cross the border from Yemen.

“They possess various weapons, including the Dishqa Gun [The DShK 1938 - a Soviet heavy machine gun] and Sniper Gun [sic]. By using Dishqa, they might kill roughly forty people. Every weapon used by the border guards is visible to the migrants attempting to cut and cross the border of the KSA. They monitor the border using a webcam while seated at a checkpoint that resembles a building. They were armed with powerful weaponry.”

**21-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia**

“Saudi border guards had an automated device with a camera. It's large. After identifying us, they opened gunfire on us.”

**25-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia**

During his three-month forced stay at a place where smugglers gather migrants next to the border, one 18-year-old migrant said he saw many “severely wounded migrants who had been shot at while trying to cross the Saudi border”. Another who returned after being caught and later deported in March 2024 said, “suddenly, we heard loud gunfire, as if it was being fired on us, and a moment later, many wounded migrants descended off the mountain to escape from the firing of guns by Saudi border guards who were on the ‘merkez’ (i.e. the lookout tower). They shot the migrants, and most migrants were highly injured. A number of them died at the crossing point; several of them lost their eyes, fingers, legs, and ears.”

Saudi border guards appear to shoot-to-kill suspected contraband smugglers who are often, but not always, Yemeni. Such smugglers reportedly use migrants as ‘human shields’, leading to casualties among migrants.

“The route is rife with the smuggling of illegal drugs, including ganja, hashish, khat, and cigarettes. Illegal migrants are used as human shields by the drug smugglers. They primarily target drug smugglers when they fire their weapons, but they also kill or injure migrants in the course of doing so.”

21-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia

If they can identify them, Saudi border guards also kill suspected human smugglers and traffickers, at times in front of migrants.

“...they kill the journey’s leaders or brokers in front of migrants if they are apprehended. If one of the migrants has a cell phone, he or she will be considered as broker, and the Saudi border guards fire on those people who have a phone.”

21-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia

Some migrants have previously spoken of non-Saudi foreign nationals operating heavy weapons firing on them. Again, since August 2023 the same reports were heard from recent returnees.

“Saudi Arabia’s borders are guarded by soldiers who look like from Sudan and Syria. They are on Merkez (i.e., being in a tower-like place) and have their own launcher. If they notice a large group of migrants entering Saudi Arabia, they open fire with machine guns.”

28-year-old Ethiopian male, interviewed after return to Ethiopia

No recent Ethiopian returnee from Saudi Arabia encountered for this report and no returnee previously interviewed in research in 2023, passed through the Yemen/Saudi border into Saudi Arabia without reportedly witnessing death or injury from border guards, or without experiencing harsh treatment and inhumane detention prior to deportation. Additionally, in all cases, and echoed through numerous other studies, what irregular Ethiopian migrants face at Yemen’s northern borders and once inside Saudi Arabia (if caught by police) **comes on top of harrowing experiences of death, violence, sexual predation, detention, abduction and extortion, all along the route** from Ethiopia to these border areas. This is an extraordinarily violent route for migrants and one where all perpetrators enjoy seemingly complete impunity. Indeed, certain state officials themselves, in addition to the gangs and criminals, are [also perpetrating abuse](#) and killings, whether various armed forces or other authorities ruling over different parts of the route from the Horn of Africa to Saudi Arabia. For Ethiopian migrants there appears to be no safety, succour or protection throughout this route.

MMC has only been able to interview a small number of Ethiopian returnees for this report, and without additional reliable and comprehensive data - which is doubtless extremely difficult to obtain - it is impossible to say whether proportionally the extent of migrant killings has reduced compared to one year ago. However, even if central Saudi authorities would have instructed border guards to reduce or end the killings, MMC found that **the killing of Ethiopian migrants by Saudi security officials has been continuing throughout the intervening last nine months.**

### Ten months on – at the diplomatic level

As part of this report, we contacted various government representatives including those from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; European Union officials; United Nations organisations and international NGOs. The aim was to understand the extent to which governments and international organisations had taken any action following the 2023 reports that exposed lethal Saudi border activities. Also, to find out what knowledge they had, if any, of changes that have taken place as a result of their intervention or any other action. The findings are revealing.

To respect requested confidentiality, particular agencies and governments will not be identified here unless their action was already made public, as in the case of the US (see below). Overall, **many of those contacted simply did not respond to our enquiries, perhaps illustrating that any issue relating to and especially criticising Saudi Arabia is highly sensitive.**

Of those governments that did respond, it **appears that a number of European countries did raise their concerns in respect to the issue of border killings with Saudi Arabia at the diplomatic level** following the HRW report

and publicity. Some claimed to have intervened both at the bilateral and the multilateral level including “calling on the Saudi authorities to launch an independent investigation into the matter and to cooperate with the relevant UN organisations”. Some criticism of the alleged mass killings of migrants was included by some countries at the January 2024 formal review (Universal Periodic Review) of Saudi Arabia at the UN Human Rights Council and is therefore on public record.

### A confused response from the US?

In the case of the US [various](#) news reports [described](#) the government’s reaction to the HRW report. Although Sen. Bernie Sanders [urged](#) the U.S. to investigate the accusations, the US government (like those of [Germany](#) and [Australia](#)) seemed more concerned to head off domestic criticism that somehow they could be implicated through past military [hardware and training partnerships](#) with Saudi Arabia. Additionally, they were concerned to refute accusations that they already knew of the mass killings and had said nothing. According to a New York Times [investigation](#): “The United States was told last year [2022] that Saudi security forces were shooting, shelling and abusing groups of migrants, but it chose not to raise the issue publicly”. Apparently, the UN briefed the US ambassador to Yemen in December 2022. The newspaper criticised the government for not publicly censuring the Saudis’ conduct. In response the State Department swiftly responded that U.S. diplomats had raised the issue with their Saudi counterparts and asked them to investigate following the HRW report. Furthermore, a State Department spokesperson told [Middle East Eye](#). “The United States has engaged senior Saudi officials a number of times on this over the course of the last year to express our concerns about the allegations and continues to urge that Saudi authorities undertake a thorough and transparent investigation.” Like the EU (see below), the [US also](#), urged the Saudi authorities themselves “to undertake a thorough and transparent investigation and also to meet their obligations under international law.” Later this demand was [repeated](#) by the U.S. ambassador to the Human Rights Council, Michèle Taylor, during Saudi Arabia’s formal review, in January 2024. There are also multiple mentions of Saudi’s border violence in the State Department’s [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia](#).

### Ethiopia’s non-reaction

The reaction by Ethiopia suggests they remain in the thrall of Saudi Arabia. Despite [hundreds of thousands](#) of Ethiopians being often [brutally detained and deported](#) from Saudi Arabia (since 2013 and to the present day) and the human rights of Ethiopian migrants repeatedly violated in the kingdom and at its borders and their citizens being killed, Addis refuses to criticise or challenge Saudi Arabia publicly. However, immediately after the HRW report’s release [the Foreign Ministry stated](#) that “the Government of Ethiopia will promptly investigate the incident in tandem with the Saudi Authorities.” With

**a noticeable absence of outrage and desperation not to rock any boats or affect the “excellent longstanding relations” between Addis Ababa and Riyadh**, they followed this communication by writing, “at this critical juncture, it is highly advised to exercise utmost restraint from making unnecessary speculations until (the) investigation is complete.” Ethiopia has signed a [bilateral labour agreement](#) with Saudi Arabia in 2022 and as recently as April 2023 [announced](#) to plan the recruitment of 500,000 Ethiopian women for domestic work in Saudi Arabia. Ethiopia annually receives over 76 million USD in [formal remittances](#) from Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia, with estimates of informal remittances twice as high; Saudi Arabia is the [second most important investor](#) in Ethiopia after China, with an estimated [1.4 billion USD](#) in foreign direct investment in 2020 and private investments in Ethiopia in hundreds of government-licensed projects; and trade between the two countries has been increasing each year more than [7 percent on average](#) over the last two decades. Human rights concerns that they exist may struggle to trump these economic considerations.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia made no public commitment to conduct any investigation. **Since August 2023 up to May 2024 nothing has been heard of any such investigation with both countries not responding to requests for information by journalists and MMC, but the same lethal and violent border response to Ethiopian irregular migration appears to be in place.**

### The EU’s muted reaction

The response from the European Commission was also muted and ambivalent. [On one hand](#), ten days after the HRW report, they indicated **they would not support “a possible independent UN-backed inquiry into the alleged mass killings”**. Instead, they reportedly preferred to raise the allegations in multilateral fora and directly with Saudi Arabia and the Houthi authorities in Yemen, although there is no public record that they did. Also, the EU spokesperson [said she welcomed](#) the planned joint Saudi / Ethiopia investigation because “these are serious allegations that need to be further investigated in order to ensure accountability.” Welcoming Saudi Arabia to co-investigate allegations against them with their history of non-transparency and non-accountability, is an invitation to conduct an investigation devoid of credibility. Besides, to the best of MMC’s knowledge, no such investigation has occurred. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia and the EU held their third human rights dialogue in Brussels on 28 November 2023, where the EU raised concerns focused on Saudi Arabia’s continued application of the death penalty, including for drug-related offences and non-lethal crimes, as well as lengthy prison terms imposed for social media activity. **The allegations concerning mass killings of migrants were only touched on under discussions about ‘human trafficking’ and appear to have been downgraded to “incidents at the Saudi-Yemeni border”.**

## The UN's deafening silence

After the UN's Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups made the first formal complaint on the subject in October 2022 and IOM's statements some months earlier in July (possibly leaked), the UN has been virtually silent. Considering the severity of the allegations the **UN in general appears to have pulled its punches in terms of public condemnation of Saudi Arabia's border policies.** Immediately after the HRW report was released the [UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric](#) expressed "serious concern" about the "very serious allegations" made by HRW but spoke also of the "challenges of UN staff verifying the situation at the border in Yemen." Asked if there should be an international investigation into the killings, the spokesperson said uncommittedly, "obviously, there are specific processes for these things, but there needs to be accountability."

While the UN Secretary General and the chiefs of relevant agencies like OHCHR, UNHCR and IOM routinely issue press releases highlighting rights abuse and problematic situations globally, **a deafening silence has filled the last 9 months on these unresolved issues along the Saudi/ Yemen border.** Apart from the initial comments quoted above by the UN spokesperson on August 21st 2023, there has been no public condemnation or statement from the UN, although UN staff inside Yemen and outside are aware that the killings continue today.

## Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In late January 2024 the UN Human Rights Council conducted its Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – the first since November 2018. During the review Saudi Arabia heard [dozens of countries](#) critique its human rights record on a range of subjects including the treatment of migrants in general (migrant workers) and specifically at the border (irregular migrants).

However, **there was no mention of migrants or border killings in the preparatory report and formal submission for the periodic review in November 2023,** nor was there reference to the allegations in the [UN or stakeholders](#) background information packages that inform the final submission ahead of the actual review. Because Germany and the US submitted questions on the issue of mass border killings before the meeting the issue was discussed publicly in the debate during the review. As a result a number of countries pushed for a specific recommendation on the issue of border killings. **As one of various recommendations, there is a demand that Saudi Arabia commits to "undertake a comprehensive, transparent investigation of allegations that Saudi security forces are killing and abusing migrants crossing the Yemeni border, cease any abuses, ensure accountability for any abuses or violations, and issue a public investigation report."** This recommendation was only endorsed by the US, Zambia, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brazil, Indonesia and Norway.

Ethiopia, amongst others was conspicuously absent from this short list of promoters – while it is on the list of promoters of two other recommendations. While the list is unlikely to include all countries that would no doubt like to see an investigation of the allegation and an end to the killings, it is nonetheless striking.

## Cynical realpolitik: severe human rights violations best ignored?

These ambivalent and subdued reactions from the international community may be morally indefensible but they are also understandable. In the cynical world of *realpolitik*, clearly, for many the revelations of systematic and arbitrary border killings of hundreds or even thousands of migrant men, women and children is best ignored as soon as possible if there are bigger geopolitical stakes at play. How else to explain the lack of serious engagement by the international community and brazen indifference to the accusations by Saudi Arabia itself, as well as by the country whose citizens are indiscriminately killed by another country.

Saudi Arabia is clearly too important and too powerful in relation to the broader geopolitical interests of states that have traditionally stood up to protect human rights around the globe, which has led to a muted response Saudi Arabia is pivotal in various geopolitical dialogues, partnerships and processes. Apart from their immense long-standing economic importance as a major oil producer and armament client to many OECD countries, their strategic importance in the region to close allies such as the US, the UK, France and others has been immeasurable. Not only previously with the war in Iraq, but also in supporting the globalised '[war on terror](#)' as major partners in the Saudi-led [coalition war](#) against the Houthis (*Ansar Allah*) and others in Yemen and as [host](#) of several rounds of peace talks on Sudan in Jeddah between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces. Saudi Arabia is also an important rival of Iran, which is important to western allies, although relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have somewhat normalized since they agreed to [restore diplomatic relations](#) in March 2023.

Also, when the HRW report broke last year, the US was close to concluding additions to the strategically important [Abraham Accords](#) - signed in 2020 and promising to normalise relations between Arab States and Israel – namely by trying to broker [a deal](#) between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Late 2023 there were also discussions about a Saudi-US military pact and US support for a Saudi civilian nuclear programme. The US had also just attended a Saudi-hosted [Jeddah Summit](#) where some 40 countries came together to discuss a possible peace plan for Ukraine. The EU in particular have been [keen to develop stronger ties](#) with Saudi Arabia at this time and ensure their support, despite Saudi Arabia being 'non-aligned' in the war between Russia and Ukraine.

In addition to the strategic importance, Saudi's [deep pockets](#) allow them an untouchability that repeatedly trumps human rights concerns. Evidently the kingdom is also using billions of dollars to conduct an international charm offensive. [Saudi Arabia's heavy investment in sports](#), creating the LIV Golf project, luring stars like Cristiano Ronaldo to its domestic soccer league and preparing to host soccer's Asian Cup in 2027 and [the men's World Cup in 2034](#) has led to accusations of "sportswashing" to divert attention from its dire record on human rights. [Reportedly](#), the Saudi USD 650bn (EUR 597bn) wealth fund known as the Public Investment Fund (PIF) is largely financing much of the current whitewashing of Saudi's international image and [diversification into post-oil assets](#).

Finally, perhaps the international community's failed experience in 2018 of trying to bringing Saudi Arabia [to justice](#) after the massive global reaction to the murder of journalist [Jamal Khashoggi](#) has led to a sense of resignation? Arguably, Saudi Arabia is [even stronger today](#) than it was in 2018, and as it continues to ascend it is shrugging off accusations and evidence of severe human rights abuse.

Nevertheless, as Nadia Hardman, author of the Human Rights Watch report [said last year](#), "It would be devastating, honestly, if the global attention isn't matched with an institutional response." Nine months after her report and other revelations of mass border killings emerged, this research shows that the deaths and injuries continue. Nadia Hardman was also quoted in a [New York Times Op-Ed](#), saying "We are at a level where state officials are directly firing explosive weapons and shooting people at a border and doing such insidious things like forcing a boy to rape a girl survivor. Where do we go from here?". This report provides a shocking answer to this question: one year on, we went from massive border killings, to ongoing killings of Ethiopian migrants at the Saudi-Yemen border and despite short-lived media and public outrage, it's been quickly forgotten, there has been no accountability, no consequences for Saudi Arabia, no independent and international investigations and very little evidence of any results of it being raised at bilateral and multilateral levels.

So little has been done to censure Saudi Arabia, which surely can find an alternative, less cruel way of deterring the poorest of irregular migrants whose only offense is desperately wanting to be economically productive in a hugely wealthy migrant-dependent economy.





MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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