

# Morocco drops case against Spanish activist who helped save lives at sea

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## **Helena Maleno, who aided rescue of migrants, accused of colluding with traffickers**

A Moroccan court has abandoned proceedings against a Spanish human rights activist who had been investigated for supposedly colluding with people traffickers despite helping to save the lives of hundreds of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean.

Helena Maleno and her Walking Borders NGO operate by fielding distress calls from people crossing from north Africa and passing on their locations to the Spanish coastguard so they can be rescued.

Earlier this year, the Spanish government said 70% of the alert calls made to the maritime rescue service came from Maleno.

Although she has won plaudits and prizes for her work, the activist has come under investigation in Spain and Morocco.

In November 2017, she was summoned to court in Tangier over allegations that her activities meant she was aiding people traffickers and helping to facilitate illegal immigration.

The case provoked an outcry in Spain, where more than 200 prominent Spanish figures – including the actors Javier Bardem and Eduardo Noriega – signed a petition in support of Maleno.

On Monday, Walking Borders announced that the Moroccan court had dropped the case because of a lack of evidence against Maleno.

“I trusted in the justice of Morocco, which is also my home, and we’ve won this battle,” Maleno said. “At a time when defending the rights of migrants is becoming criminalised all over the world – and especially in Europe – the shelving of the case gives us exactly the kind of news we need to keep doing our job.”

Spanish police launched an investigation into Maleno’s activities seven years ago, but the case against her was dropped by the country’s high court in April 2017 on the grounds that her actions did not constitute a criminal offence.

According to Maleno, police in Spain then passed their investigation on to the Moroccan authorities who, she says, tapped her phones.

In recent years, human rights activists in Europe have increasingly found themselves thwarted and even prosecuted for trying to help refugees and migrants.

In February 2017, a French farmer who helped African migrants cross the border from Italy and provided them with shelter, was given a suspended €3,000 (£2,660) fine for aiding illegal arrivals.

In August the same year, Italian police seized a rescue ship operated by German NGO Jugend Rettet as part of an Italian attempt to end the Mediterranean migrant and refugee crisis.

Figures from the International Organization for Migration show that 113,145 migrants and refugees reached Europe by sea in 2018, while 2,242 died in the attempt.

Spain had the most arrivals – 56,480 – followed by Greece (31,310) and Italy (23,126).

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**P.S.**

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/morocco-drops-case-spanish-activist-helena-maleno>