

UN appeals to EU states to accept refugees stranded on Italian Coast Guard ship



United Nations, August 27 (RHC)-- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has urged EU countries to take responsibility for over 150 refugees, mostly from Eritrea, who have been stranded on an Italian Coast Guard vessel for several days.

In a statement on Saturday, the UN's Refugee Agency implored EU member states to immediately take in some of the refugees on board Diciotti in the port city of Catania.

The refugees have been denied entry into Italy since being rescued by the Italian coast guards on August 16, waiting for the resolution of a serious standoff in Europe over the hot-button issue of refugees.

Rome has warned it will cut its annual funding to the EU if no solution is found for the refugees stranded aboard Diciotti.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has deplored the "political tug-of-war" between European states, saying "the time has come to end the back-and-forth that has seen countries competing in a race to the bottom on who can take the least responsibility for people rescued at sea."

In his statement, Grandi warned about the dangerous consequences of putting the lives of refugees at risk, and described the move as “immoral.”

He also said the UN is “concerned” about the repercussions of a continued adoption of an “ad-hoc” approach toward the issue, urging Europe to “do the right thing and offer places of asylum” for those stranded.

Grandi also called on the Italian government to immediately allow the disembarkation of refugees who have been sleeping on cardboard boxes for the past nine days.

Italy’s populist government says it will not let the refugees disembark unless other EU member states commit to share the responsibility and accept some of those refugees.

There were initially 177 refugees aboard the vessel, but the Italian government on Wednesday allowed 27 teenagers to disembark in the Sicilian city.

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