

UN reports at least 11 migrants drown off Libyan coast



Twelve people on the shipwrecked dinghy were rescued by the Libyan coastguard near the town of Zawiya [File: Pablo Garcia/AFP]

Tripoli, May 3 (RHC)-- At least 11 people drowned when a rubber dinghy carrying two dozen Europe-bound migrants capsized off Libya, the UN migration agency said. The International Organization for

Migration (IOM) said the tragedy took place on Sunday near the western town of Zawiya. The Libyan coastguard saved the lives of 12 migrants, it said in a Twitter post.

“The continuous loss of life calls for an urgent change in approach to the situation in Libya and the Central Med,” the IOM tweeted.

Sunday’s deadly shipwreck was the latest along the Central Mediterranean migration route. Last month, at least 130 people were presumed dead after their boat capsized off Libya, in one of the deadliest maritime tragedies in years along the busy route.

Libya descended into chaos following the 2011 military actions that toppled and killed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. In the years since the "uprising" -- aided and abetted by Washington and its NATO allies -- Libya has emerged as the dominant transit point for people travelling towards Europe.

Since 2014, more than 20,000 migrants and refugees have died at sea while trying to reach Europe from Africa. More than 17,000 of those have been on the Central Mediterranean which is described by the UN as the most dangerous migration route in the world.

There has been a spike in crossings and attempted crossings from Libya in recent weeks. Approximately 7,000 Europe-bound migrants were intercepted and returned to Libya so far this year, according to the IOM's tally.

Smugglers often pack desperate families into ill-equipped rubber boats that stall and founder along the perilous Central Mediterranean route. Thousands have drowned along the way. Others were intercepted and returned to Libya to be left at the mercy of armed groups or confined in squalid detention centres.

Human rights groups and UN agencies have denounced inhumane treatment faced by people at Libyan detention centres saying they endured beatings, rapes and insufficient rations.

The European Union has reportedly spent more than 90 million euros (\$109 million) in funding and training the Libyan coastguard to stop the crossings.

An Associated Press investigation revealed the EU sent more than 327.9 million euros (\$397.9 million) to Libya, largely channelled through UN agencies.

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