

At least 73 dead after Lebanese migrant boat sinks off Syrian coast



A handout picture, released by the Syrian Red Crescent on September 23, 2022, shows rescuers transporting the body of a drowning victim in Syria's southern port city of Tartus, after a boat

transporting migrants from Lebanon sank off the Syrian coast. (By AFP)

Damascus, September 23 (RHC)-- At least 73 people have drowned while 20 others were rescued after a small boat they boarded in Lebanon sank off Syria's coast, according to Syrian and Lebanese officials.

Syrian Health Minister Mohammed Hassan Ghabbash told state TV that 73 people had died and 20 had been rescued alive in the Thursday incident.

Syrian Health Ministry said that "Oxygen assistance has been provided to most of the hospitalized people and some of them have been transferred to intensive care." Tartus is a port in southern Syria and is just 50km north of Lebanon's Tripoli where the passengers had reportedly boarded.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's caretaker transport minister Ali Hamie said that more than 100 people were on board when the boat sank in the Mediterranean Sea on Thursday. According to estimations of Syrian officials, some 150 passengers were on board. Most of the passengers have been reportedly Lebanese and Syrians.

Hamie confirmed that five of the rescued were Lebanese, adding, "I am discussing with Syria's transport minister a mechanism to retrieve the bodies from Syria." The head of Syrian ports Samer Kbrasli said that rescue teams were dispatched to find survivors on Thursday, however, the search was interrupted due to strong waves in the evening.

Meanwhile, Sleiman Khalil, an official with Syria's transport ministry said this is "one of our largest ever rescue operations" as they should cover a large area that extends along the entire Syrian coast.

This was the second shipwreck of this type in the region as at least six people died and 48 people were rescued in a similar incident in April. That boat was carrying about 60 migrants and sank off the coast of Lebanon. The latest incident stoked public anger in Tripoli, Lebanon's second city and one of its poorest.

Since late 2019, Lebanon has been mired in a deep financial crisis that has caused the Lebanese pound to lose around 90 percent of its value to the US dollar and led its banking system to collapse, plunging the bulk of Lebanese into poverty.

The economic and financial crisis is mostly linked to the sanctions that the United States and its allies have imposed on Lebanon as well as foreign intervention in the Arab nation's domestic affairs.

The United Nations refugee agency says at least 1,570 people, 186 of them Lebanese, left or tried to leave by sea from Lebanon between January and November 2021. Most were hoping to reach the island country and European Union member state of Cyprus, which lies 175 kilometers (109 miles) away.

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