

Boat capsizes off Senegal, leaving more than a dozen dead



The boat carrying people ran aground off the coast of Ouakam, Senegal [Ngouda Dione/Reuters]

Dakar, July 25 (RHC)-- At least 15 people have drowned after a boat carrying migrants and refugees capsized off the coast of the capital Dakar, according to Senegal's President Macky Sall, in the latest tragedy involving desperate people undertaking perilous sea journey to reach Europe.

"I express my deep sorrow following the death of around fifteen Senegalese people following the sinking of a pirogue [a long wooden boat] off the coast of Dakar. My heartfelt condolences to the families and

loved ones of the victims,” Sall said on his Twitter account.

The bodies were discovered by the Senegalese Navy early on Monday morning and are believed to be migrants because of the type of boat they were in, said Ndeye Top Gueye, the deputy mayor of the Ouakam neighborhood of Dakar where the bodies were found. “Because of the size and shape, we know that it’s a pirogue,” she said.

While this is the first time bodies have washed up in the neighborhood, migrant deaths at sea are becoming more common in Senegal, she said. “It’s not the first time, it’s the umpteenth time. The government needs to take countermeasures.”

Babacar Diallo, an Ouakam fisherman who went down to the beach at dawn to prepare boats for the day’s catch, said he saw people trying to help with rescue efforts. “There were at least 12 dead bodies on the shore. Two people came out alive,” Diallo said. Bodies were also being brought ashore hours later.

“They are still retrieving bodies, but the water is not clear. We indicated to them where they could find them. We live here, and in case of danger, we can tell them where to find the bodies. There are probably still more bodies,” Diallo added.

A contingent of firefighters and divers were still searching for bodies in the area on Monday afternoon.

Senegal has seen a surge in migrant boats attempting the Atlantic migration route to Spain’s Canary Islands. Although it is one of the deadliest routes, numerous accidents have failed to dissuade those seeking to make the journey.

Senegal’s navy said on July 13th that it had intercepted a boat with around 70 migrants risking the perilous journey, the third reported crossing this month as attempted crossings from West Africa pick up in the warmer summer months.

At the beach where the bodies were found, reporters saw rescuers and volunteers working together to pull the capsized boat ashore. Clothes from the deceased washed onto the side and lay in a pile while authorities coordinated a response.

Thousands of people from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region take the perilous sea route to reach Europe, often aboard dinghy boats. Last year, nearly 3,800 people died, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The United Nations has recorded more than 20,000 deaths and disappearances in the central Mediterranean since 2014, making it the most dangerous migrant crossing in the world.

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