

300 Migrants Died Trying to Reach Italy This Week



Rome, February 12 (RHC)-- Over 300 people have died while attempting to cross the sea from Africa to Italy this week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says. The UN agency reported the incident on Wednesday, and reiterated its call on Europe to further develop its border operations, which lack a clear directive in regard to saving migrant lives.

"This is a tragedy on an enormous scale and a stark reminder that more lives could be lost if those seeking safety are left at the mercy of the sea," said UNHCR Europe Director Vincent Cochetel in a statement.

This week's death toll includes 29 people who were killed by hypothermia after they were rescued by the Italian coast guard. The incident has rekindled censure over a decision made by Italy last year to halt full scale search and rescue operations of its coasts.

Among the recent incidents, an Italian boat pulled nine people from the water, the only survivors from two boats which the sea had earlier claimed. A further 200 people are yet to be accounted for. Two of the boats were part of a four-ship flotilla that had left the shore near the Libyan capital city Tripoli on Saturday, said UNHCR spokeswoman Carlotta Sami. According to survivors, a third ship which carried some 100 migrants is still missing. More than 100 people were picked up by the Italian coast guard on Sunday from a fourth boat.

The UNHCR estimated death toll was calculated on the basis of survivors' reports. The survivors are mostly from Libya, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gambia, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania.

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