

Survivors say at least 60 refugees died in Mediterranean



Tripoli, June 22 (RHC)-- At least 60 refugees were drowned after their rubber dinghy sank in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya last week, survivors have said. Nearly 40 survivors from the boat, which capsized on June 12th off the coast of Libya, were among more than 500 refugees on board the Diciotti, an Italian coastguard ship, which docked at the Sicilian port of Pozzallo.

Survivors interviewed by volunteers from the human rights association Medu in Sicily said their boat was transporting 117 people, which would put the death toll at more than 70. However, the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) NGO put the toll slightly lower at 60, also citing accounts from survivors, who said 100 people were aboard the dinghy.

At the time of the accident, the U.S. Navy came to the aid of drowning refugees, reporting spotting about 12 bodies in the water but it was unable to locate them after the rescue. "I have never seen such frightened and traumatized eyes after a landing," said Teo di Piazza, coordinator of MSF psychologists. "The people had no strength left."

Europe's refugee crisis escalated last week after Italy and Malta turned away Aquarius rescue ship carrying 629 refugees and kept it waiting in international waters between the two countries for over 30 hours with limited food and drink supplies and in bad weather conditions, facing potential death.

Spain eventually offered to take in the ship amid safety fears due to deteriorating weather conditions and offered its port in Valencia as a place for the asylum seekers to land in Europe.

Europe has faced its worst refugee crisis since World War II. The continent has been hit since 2014 by an unprecedented influx of refugees fleeing conflict-ridden zones in North Africa and the Middle East, in particular Syria.

Over the past five years, more than 600,000 refugees have reached Italy by risking their lives on rickety human smuggler boats at the sea. Some 500,000 of them are still staying in the country.

According to the UN migration agency (IOM), over 3,000 refugees lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean in 2017. The majority of refugees from Africa take the sea route from Libya to Italy to reach Europe, while some others depart from Morocco to Spain.

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