

Italian interior minister orders coast guard not to rescue migrants



Rome, July 27 (RHC)-- Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Salvini announced on Friday that 135 migrants who remain aboard an Italian Coast Guard vessel will not disembark in his country unless European countries agree to take them.

"The European Commission has been officially requested to coordinate the distribution operations of immigrants remaining on board an Italian Coast Guard vessel. It is about 135 people. Awaiting official responses, no port has been assigned for the landing," Interior Minister sources told the media.

On Thursday, the Italian Coast Guard rescued African migrants who were in pneumatic boats drifting in the Mediterranean. The Italian officials also trans-shipped about fifty shipwrecks who had been rescued by the Italian fishing vessel *Accursio Giarratano* in international waters off Malta, a country that refused to receive them. "I have ordered that no port be assigned before there is a redistribution across Europe of all migrants on board" Salvini said.

On July 23, fourteen EU countries carried out a meeting in Paris and gave their "agreement of principle" to a Franco-German initiative to create a temporary solidarity mechanism which allows the landing of

rescued migrants and their subsequent distribution among EU territories. During this meeting, in which Italy did not participate, Salvini said it was "an error of form and substance".

Commenting on the French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal, the far right Italian minister said that "Italy will not be your refugee camp... If he expects us to sign a document [allowing] ships arrive at Italy, he is wrong... We are not anyone's escort ladies... I do not take lessons in generosity and democracy from Macron."

Despite the "Closed Ports" policy promoted by Salvini, hundreds of African shipwreckers are still arriving in Italy.

In related news, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported Thursday about the possible death of 150 migrants who were shipwrecked off the coast of Libya while trying to reach Europe.

This tragedy occurred because most rescue ships are not active due to seizure threats made by the Italian authorities. The only operational ship is the "Ocean Viking" of SOS Méditerranée and Doctors without Borders, but has not yet reached the area, and the Open Arms ship is docked in Sicily.

On Friday, the UNHCR demanded from the European Union (EU) to resume maritime rescue operations and recognize the important role of humanitarian organizations in such tasks.

"NGOs are crucial in search and rescue operations. Their efforts should not be stigmatized or criminalized. There must also be EU rescue vessels in the Mediterranean," Charlie Yaxley, the UNHCR spokesperson said in Geneva.

"The Libya wreck shows once again how urgent our requests are to Europe and other governments to restore rescue operations and help in the suffering of thousands of refugees and migrants trapped in the Libyan conflict."

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