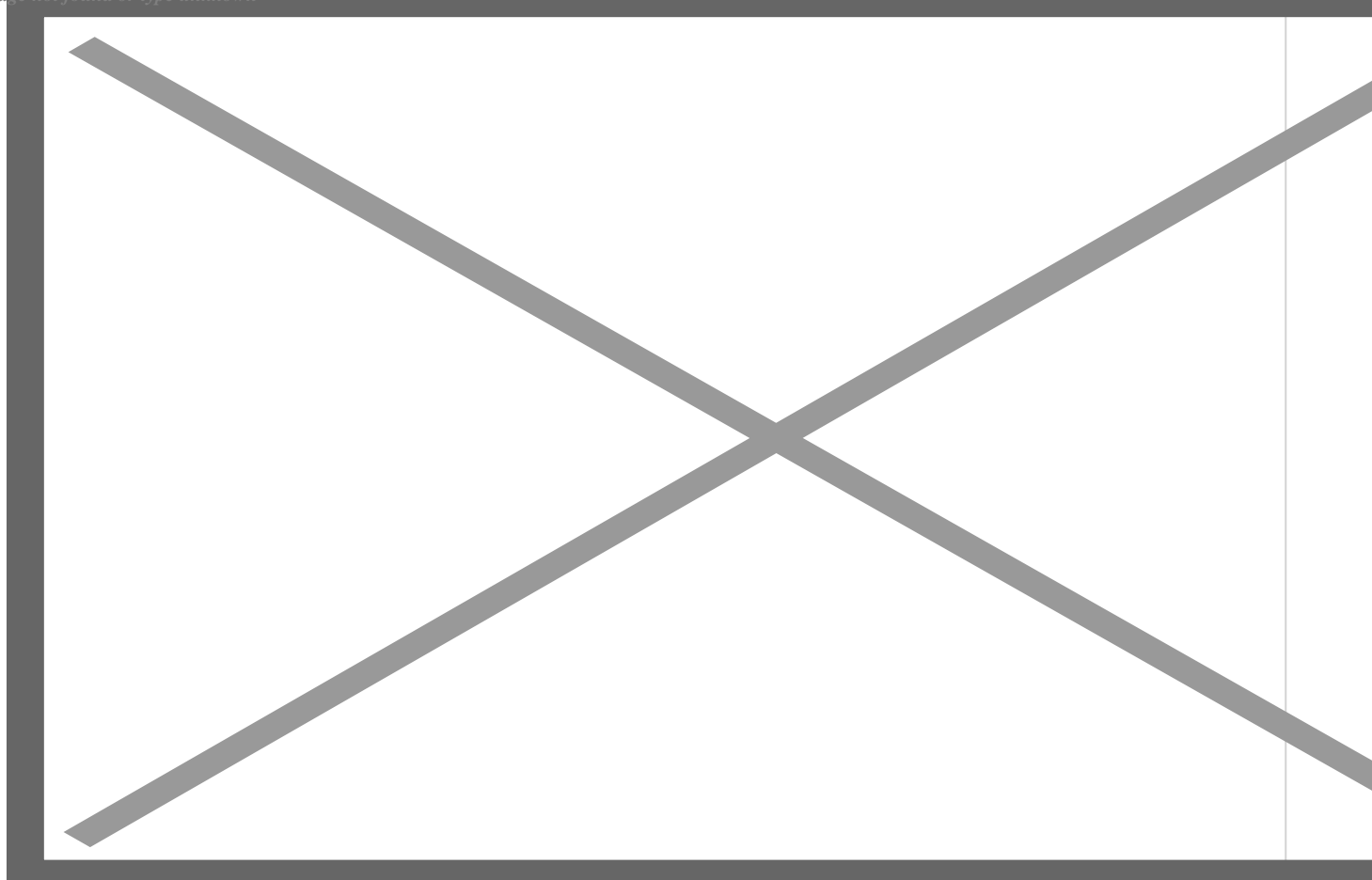


Five boats carrying hundreds of migrants land in Italy's Lampedusa

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Rome, May 10 (RHC)-- Five boats carrying hundreds of migrants landed in Lampedusa after being intercepted by Italian authorities off the coast of the Mediterranean island, ANSA news agency reported on Sunday.

Lampedusa is one of the main landing points on the route for migrants departing mostly from Tunisia and Libya to reach Europe. "Migrants arrivals are resuming alongside good weather," Lampedusa mayor Toto Martello told state broadcaster RAI. "We need to restart discussions about the immigration issue," he said.

ANSA said one of the boats, carrying 325 people, was intercepted 8 miles off Lampedusa. A patrol vessel belonging to the Italian tax police, who deal with financial crime and smuggling, escorted a second boat carrying some 90 people to the island, ANSA reported. Two other boats carrying 98 and 16 people landed the Mediterranean island on Sunday, the news agency added.

Some 400 migrants of various nationalities disembarked on Sunday from a fifth boat, a drifting fishing vessel, the Italian news agency said in a separate report. The order followed a safety inspection that found too many life jackets on board, saying the ship's sewage system is insufficient for the potential number of people rescued.

Activists claim the inspection was a smokescreen to block the ship. "We hope the authorities will not stop us from leaving for the central Mediterranean with the absurd accusations to which we have become accustomed," Sea-Watch Italy had tweeted on Friday after returning from its latest mission.

Another vessel, Sea-Watch 3, was impounded by the Italian coastguard in March in the Sicilian port of Augusta, again over safety issues. The aid groups have also faced accusations of colluding with Libyan migrant traffickers to bring people to safety on European shores -- charges they strongly deny.

Italy is a prime entry point for Europe-bound migrants, but the stretch of water between Sicily and North Africa is one of the world's deadliest migration routes. Almost 530,000 migrants have landed on Italian shores since the start of 2015, including some 6,000 in the year to date, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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