

Toll in Libya Refugee Boat Disaster Could Rise to 300



Tripoli, August 29 (RHC)-- The death toll from a recent refugee shipwreck off the coast of Libya could rise to 300 as many are still missing following the tragic sinking of their overcrowded boats.

In a Friday statement, the United Nations refugee agency said up to 200 people were missing and feared dead after Libyan coastguards managed to rescue nearly 200 from the two boats carrying an estimated 500 refugees that capsized a day earlier.

Officials in Libya's Red Crescent said at least 105 people were killed as they were counting the bodies and the survivors from a waterlogged vessel which was towed back earlier in the day to the port city of Zuwara in northwestern Libya.

"The boat sank out sea, and a coast guard team is still diving in and checking inside to see if there's anyone else," he said, adding that there were conflicting casualty figures.

Libyan Red Crescent spokesman Mohammad al-Misrati told AFP on Friday that 198 people have so far been rescued. Libyan coastguards found the bodies of 51 people on Wednesday when they launched a rescue operation off Libya. The refugees had reportedly died of suffocation in the hold of a boat, with some of the survivors saying that smugglers had forcibly packed it with people to demand more money only to allow them to come up and breathe fresh air.

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