

Dozens of Refugees Found Dead in Niger Sahara Desert



Algiers, June 16 (RHC)-- The bodies of nearly three dozen refugees, including women and children, have been found in Niger's Sahara Desert, where they were apparently abandoned by smugglers en route to neighboring Algeria and eventually Europe. Niger's Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum said two of the victims have been identified as Nigerians but the nationalities of the others were not immediately clear.

Bazoum said the bodies were found near the northern desert town of Assamaka, at a border post between Niger and Algeria. The refugees, he said, had died between June 6 and 12. Thirst was described in the statement as a probable cause. Temperatures currently stand at 42 degrees in the region.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has estimated that 120,000 people crossed through the Niger desert last year and 60,000 between February and April this year. The IOM also recorded 37 refugee deaths in the desert in 2015.

Libya used to play host to the majority of the refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa on their way to Europe, but since the North African country plunged into political chaos in 2011, Algeria has become the new route.

Thousands of illegal migrants and refugees have recently arrived in Algeria on their way to Europe, mostly from neighboring Mali and Niger. More than 7,000 Nigerien migrants, mostly women and children, were

turned back from Algeria to their home country in 2015 as part of an agreement between the two countries' governments.

Meanwhile, Europe has recently curbed the number of illegal arrivals from Africa, after a deal with Ankara in March reduced the number of people trying to cross from Turkey

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