

Shipwreck in Libyan waters: dozens of refugees perish

Lampedusa, May 9th, 2011. For months EveryOne Group and a network of NGOs for human rights have been calling on the international institutions to set up a service able to follow, mile by mile, the boats that set sail from Libya with refugees aboard. The cost and logistics of such a service could easily be taken from the EU funds laid aside for emergencies linked to migratory flows from countries where humanitarian crises are underway. Unfortunately, our requests - which may have saved many lives - have been regularly ignored. The international institutions have often answered our requests on less important issues, but our appeals to save the lives of children, women and men in serious danger have fallen on deaf ears. Yesterday morning a boat with more than 600 sub-Saharan refugees on board was shipwrecked off the coast of Libya. Dozens of people perished in the disaster, including very small babies and their mothers, while others managed to swim to the Libyan coast. More than 20 bodies, including many Somalis, have already been recovered, but it is assumed that the number of victims is much higher. More than 30 Somalis are missing. "More than 300 people lost their lives in the shipwreck," said a young Somali who survived the accident. Another boat with 655 refugees on board arrived at Lampedusa in the night, and was rescued twenty miles from the coast by Coast Guard patrol boats.

EveryOne Group



Serious violations of refugees' rights are taking place in Libya, Tunisia and the EU.

Rome, May 8th, 2011. We are publishing an email we received concerning the boat of Eritrean refugees which disappeared off the Libyan coast on March 22nd. The refugees were arrested and jailed, but they are not allowed to make phone calls or request a meeting with UNHCR. Although the Geneva Convention envisages it, both the Tunisian and Libyan authorities (after signing semi-official agreements with EU member countries) are preventing the refugees from seeking asylum or temporary protection

in Europe. EveryOne Group has received information that both Tunisian and Libyan authorities have stopped Libyan boats loaded down with refugees fleeing from sub-Saharan Africa or other humanitarian crises. EveryOne Group and the network of NGOs working for the rights of refugees is once again asking the EU institutions and the UN to take action to prevent these serious and ongoing cases of abuse affecting the refugees: innocent children, women and men who are seeking protection from persecution but who instead find an impenetrable barrier of intolerance and injustice.

Massachusetts (USA), May 7, 2011. Hello! I appreciate EveryoneGroup's call for an investigation into the disappearance of the Eritreans who departed from Libya on March 22nd, and would like to provide additional information.

An Eritrean whom I know in Asmara received the text message below from a friend of his in Libya who had received a cell phone call from an individual who reports having been a passenger on board the boat in question, and who says that all on board were captured and brought back to Libya. The text message was received on April 17th, and has been reported to the UNHCR. Below is the text of the message, which was written in Tigrinya.

wediabay: Habreta seat 12 30 am arbi leyti malt hiji kadam wegahta malet eyu zegateme koynu ab himak kunetat alewu selzi netom kendi sebat ab un yekun gual chirum zeblewom sebat neza ab libya zelwu sebat hizoma zelu number amehalalifulna etza numebr naytom ab libya zelwu eya (omissis) tegdiskum amehalalifulna ekum nezbletse habreta mes tedlyu bezia n libya dewilkum kitrekbewom tekilu ekum netom geday zekonu hiji bezrekbnayo habreta kea kabatom 6 sebat tefom alewu selzi beztaklekum meten amehalalifulna ekum yeknyelna yehwat wealely hidereley zeydelyo guday eyu tnx amlak yehagezom

A different Eritrean now living in the USA gave the following translation of the above:

This happened on March 22nd around 12:30 am. Those people they get captured from the sea and they returned back to Libya, but we don't know where they are. We got this information by the phone number (omissis). The person who called said: We are in a bad situation inside Libya; we need help. If you need to contact me, night is the only time because daytime we have a bad connection. From all of us, we lost six people already. And he is begging for help.

There have been other news reports of people who were captured at sea and brought back to Libya, with which the above is consistent.

Since the above contains a cell phone number of an individual who reports being right now in a perilous situation, I would ask that the cell phone number itself not be made public, though I have no objection should it be shared with aid organizations, or should the general information be shared with others, though I ask that my name not be used.

Sincerely,
(signed email)

Massachusetts (USA)

EveryOne Group