

Over 100 Migrants, Children Drown off Libyan Coast

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11/09/2018



The group reportedly asked for help from Italian coast guard but the boats started sinking before assistance arrived.

According to the aid agency, Doctors Without Border (Medecins Sans Frontieres or MSF), more than 100 people, including 20 children died in early September of the coast of Libya when their boats were wrecked.

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MSF stated that two rubber boats carrying hundreds of people from countries such as Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Libya, Algeria, and Egypt, left Libya on Sept. 1. But one boat carrying 165 adults and 20 children deflated and sank leading scores to their death. Another boat's engine failed.

Some people survived by clinging to floating wreckage. The 276 survivors, including pregnant women, children, and infants, were brought to the Libyan port of Khoms on Sept. 2 by the Libyan Coast Guard as per MSF. Only two bodies were recovered.

“We couldn't swim and only a few people had life jackets. Those among us who

could hold on the boat's floating hood stayed alive," a survivor said to MSF.

MSF provided urgent medical assistance after the survivors disembarked. "Our medical team worked solidly for several hours to assist survivors with the most serious conditions," said Jai Defrancis, an MSF nurse working in Northwest Libya.

The survivors were transferred to a detention center in Libya where MSF is concerned about their safety despite providing further care. MSF also said the survivors are being held in "arbitrary detention."

"How can they recover when locked inside cells, in very poor hygiene conditions and sleeping on blankets or mattresses placed on the floor that cause incredible pain for those suffering from severe burns?" said Jai Defrancis

Apart from the grim condition of the migrants in the detention center, UNHCR warned Monday that human traffickers are posing as aid workers to gain access to migrants in Libya. They are either being kidnapped for ransom or sold into slavery.

"Reliable sources and refugees have reported criminals using vests and other items with logos similar to that of UNHCR, at disembarkation points and smuggling hubs," the UNHCR said in a statement. "The reports of criminals impersonating UNHCR staff come as the situation for refugees and migrants detained or living in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, has dramatically deteriorated."

Crossing the sea is a perilous journey for migrants. According to the International Organization for Migration, over 1,500 migrants have died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean so far in this year alone.

The Libyan coast guard with the support of European Union returned 13,185 refugees and migrants to Libya between January and August 2018. Italy, with the approval of European Union, also started training and equipping Libyan coast guard to perform rescues i.e., "pulling back" migrant boats.

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