
29 migrants die of hypothermia while crossing Mediterranean

10/02/2015



The victims were among 106 people packed aboard an inflatable life raft who were trying to cross the Mediterranean in rough seas and freezing temperatures, Italian coast guard Cmdr Filippo Marini said yesterday. The migrants had summoned help late Sunday via satellite telephone while still off Libya's coast.

Marini said a merchant ship in the area responded until the coast guard arrived from the southernmost Italian island of Lampedusa and took on board both the survivors and the victims in seas with waves as high as nine metres (30 feet), roughly the height of a three-storey building.

Rescuers found seven corpses on board the raft, while the rest of the victims, in very poor physical condition, died during the rescue and while being transported to land, Marini said.

"The smugglers, in their wickedness, threw them in a life raft in the middle of the sea," Marini said. "It is obvious they were traveling in physically stressful conditions. We are in the middle of winter, with conditions at the limit for everyone."

Desperation Of Migrants

Save the Children said the number of migrant arrivals this year is outpacing even the extraordinary rate of arrivals of 2014, indicating the desperation of migrants to flee to Europe, many from war and conflict. While Libya once provided a sort of layover, renewed conflict there

has forced migrants to continue their journey even throughout the harsh winter months.

In January, 3,528 migrants reached Italy, up by two-thirds from 2,171 in the first month of 2014, a year that brought 170,100 migrants to Italy's shores.

"Bad winter conditions have not interrupted the flows of sea arrivals, and demonstrate the lack of alternatives for those who are forced, notwithstanding everything, to attempt a crossing," said Raffaele Milano, Save the Children's director in Italy.

Hundreds die each year trying to make the crossing, often in unseaworthy boats, including 360 migrants who died off Lampedusa in October 2013. The tragedy prompted Italy to launch costly humanitarian patrols of the Mediterranean that were suspended last November in favour of a Europe-led Triton monitoring programme.

The latest deaths raised calls for renewed humanitarian patrols of the Mediterranean, with Save the Children and others noting that the Triton program calls only for monitoring of European waters, not international or Libyan seas where many migrant tragedies, like Monday's, unfold.
