

Beat: Miscellaneous

315 migrant die in latest boat tragedies on the Mediterranean Sea

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USPA News - At least 315 migrants who were attempting to travel by boat from North Africa to Europe are feared to have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in three separate boat tragedies over the weekend, the UN's refugee agency said on Tuesday, making the past few days the deadliest so far this year. The first and worst accident happened late on Friday when a boat carrying at least 270 people overturned near Qarabouli, which is to the east of the Libyan capital of Tripoli.

The Libyan coastguard was able to rescue only nineteen people, including a woman, after they were alerted the next morning. The remaining passengers are all feared to have drowned, and the bodies of at least 100 people, including five children under the age of five and seven women, have since been recovered by the Libyan coastguard. The exact number of passengers remained unclear on Tuesday and will likely never be known. The UN refugee agency UNHCR said survivors told investigators that the boat was already packed full when more people were pushed on board shortly before departure. "According to accounts, the boat suddenly flipped, trapping the people on the lower deck," UNHCR spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said. The second accident happened on Saturday evening before an Italian search and rescue aircraft spotted the damaged rubber dinghy about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Libyan territorial waters. Life rafts were dropped to people who had fallen into the water while the Italian Navy was sent to the scene. The UN refugee agency said a total of 73 people were rescued but the Italian Navy also recovered 18 bodies, while at least 10 other passengers are still believed to remain unaccounted-for. Most of the passengers were from Mali, Cote D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Guinea and Sudan. The third accident happened on Sunday evening when a fishing boat carrying roughly 400 people capsized north of the Libyan coast in bad weather. The Italian navy and coastguard, in a joint operation with a nearby merchant ship, rescued 364 people. A total of 24 bodies have been recovered as of Tuesday, but at least a dozen - and possibly more - are feared to remain missing. The United Nations believes at least 1,889 people have died so far this year while attempting to make the dangerous journey from North Africa to Europe. More than 600 people hoping to reach safety in Europe drowned or went missing last year, making the Mediterranean Sea the world's deadliest stretch of water for migrants and refugees. At least 500 died in 2012 and around 1,500 in 2011. So far this year, a record 108,000 migrants have arrived to Italy by sea, most of whom are fleeing either the worsening security situation in Libya or the raging civil war in Syria. The numbers surpass the record 63,000 migrants who were rescued by Italy in 2011 at the height of the Arab Spring. Some 15,000 migrants have also arrived in Greece.

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