

The Mediterranean Human-smuggling Boom

TRAILER

As the economic crunch continues to tighten, thousands of people around the world are striving to find alternative means survival including migrating to places, especially Europe, perceived to have good prospects. Recent reports indicate that human smuggling has been rampant off the Libyan coast and Humanitarian organizations are now raising concern even as the smuggling season approaches.

RUNTIME: 04:14

COUNTRY: LIBYA

FILMING LOCATION: MEDITERRANEAN SEA, ITALIAN COAST

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

SOURCE: A24 MEDIA

SCRIPT

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed concerns over the increased human smuggling incidents in the Mediterranean. UNHCR's comments from UN Palais briefing held on Monday.

UNHCR says its shocked by the reports of hundreds of people trying to reach Europe missing off the coast of Libya. The organization says that details are still sketchy, but reports indicate a number of vessels carrying several hundred people set sail from the coast of Libya in the direction of Italy over the last few days. At least one boat reportedly went down and hundreds of people aboard are reported missing. Egyptian authorities said the mishap occurred about 30 kms off the Libyan coast and that some Egyptian nationals were rescued. Bodies were also recovered. Authorities said those aboard included North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans.

This is the beginning of the smuggling season in the Mediterranean. UNHCR Rome reported two boats have arrived in Italy this week – one carrying 244 people in Sicily; and another with 219 aboard in Lampedusa. Last year 36,000 people arrived in Italy by sea from North Africa. Some 75 percent of them applied for asylum and about 50

percent of those received some form of international protection from the Italian authorities.

This tragic incident illustrates, once again, the dangers faced by people caught in mixed irregular movements of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean and elsewhere which every year cost thousands of lives.

High Commissioner António Guterres speaking at the briefing expressed sorrow at the tragic loss of life. Mr. Guterres described the incident as “the latest tragic example of a global phenomenon in which desperate people take desperate measures to escape conflict, persecution and poverty in search of a better life.” We are seeing it all over the world,” he said. The High Commissioner noted that globalization has been asymmetric explaining that money moves freely; goods tend to move more and more freely; but the obstacles to the movement of people are still in place and, to a certain extent, increasing.

“This is a paradox. We have more and more people on the move and more and more barriers to their movement, creating a situation in which a large number of the people who cross international borders do so in an irregular way,” he said.

“And when people move in irregular ways, it becomes all the more difficult to distinguish between economic migrants and bona fide refugees or asylum seekers,” he added.

Mr. Guterres said the incident also underscores the need to increase international cooperation for rescue at sea.

In another development, Erika Feller, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, is visiting Greece from today until April 3 for a series of meetings with Greek authorities that will include a discussion of the current situation of asylum seekers in the country, including arrivals by sea. Tomorrow, Ms. Feller will visit the port town of Patras where mostly Afghan migrants, including asylum seekers and over 250 unaccompanied minors, live in a makeshift camp.

SHOT LIST

01:00 VARIOUS AERIAL SHOTS OF A CROWDED SMUGGLER'S BOAT AT SEA, ESCORTED BY ITALIAN COAST GUARD 8 SHOT SEPTEMBER 2005.

01:30 VARIOUS SHOTS BOARD THE ITALIAN COAST GUARD SHIP BRINGING IN SURVIVORS (SHOTS SEPTEMBER 2005)

01:58 VARIOUS SHOTS OF THE PORT OF LAMPEDUSA, REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ARE HELPED OFF THE COAST GUARD BOAT AT NIGHT (SHOT SEPTEMBER 2005)

02:48 VARIOUS WIDE SHOTS OF THE LIBYAN COAST

02:55 WIDE SHOT OF PEOPLE ON THE BEACH

02:57 VARIOUS SHOTS OF COAST GUARDS WITH IMMIGRANTS ON A VESSEL

03:11 SHOTS OF A GUARD WALKING AS HE APPROACHES IMMIGRANTS DISEMBARKING FROM A VESSEL, VARIOUS SHOTS OF IMMIGRANTS IN CONFINEMENT

03:16 VARIOUS SHOTS OF A BULLDOZER DEMOLISHING A SMUGGLER'S BOAT

03:33 VARIOUS SHOTS OF A GRAVEYARD

03:42 ITV, ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, UNHCR HIGH COMMISSIONER (ENGLISH)
(SHOT ON 31/03/09)

“It’s a human tragedy, its something that nobody can be indifferent to. We are seeing more and more people around the world trying to move desperately some are economic migrants some are refugees some asylum seekers women or children, victims of trafficking everybody needs to see their rights respected. I think we are witnessing a combination of factors poverty is increasing in today’s world in this economic crisis, food insecurity is far from...in many parts of the world at the same time we have climate change accelerating environmental degradation, we have lots of conflicts and these things are becoming more and more and so people are forced to move. Unfortunately in today’s world, we live in a globalised way but not everything is globalised in the same manner; money moves freely; goods face some obstacles but they tend to move freely but people are facing tremendous obstacles and for that reason tend to move irregularly smugglers and traffickers are creating a huge global business and its more difficult to grant protection to those in need of the protection in this dramatic situations.”

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