

Private rescue initiatives operating tirelessly: SOS MEDITERRANEE rescues over 500 refugees from drowning - one young man is recovered dead

Yesterday, in just seven hours, European rescue organization SOS MEDITERRANEE saved more than 500 people from drowning. For one young man all help was unfortunately too late, as he was found dead on one of the dinghies. The team of Doctors Without Borders could only announce his death. This year almost 800 refugees have already died in the Mediterranean in an attempt to get to Europe. Only yesterday, as many as 100 refugees are considered to have drowned in a shipwreck.

"Many people have been rescued today in the Mediterranean Sea. Since the early morning hours we have been spotting dinghies and conducted complex rescue operations in coordination with the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Rome," said Nicola Stalla, search and rescue coordinator aboard the Aquarius, the rescue vessel jointly operated by SOS MEDITERRANEE and Doctors Without Borders.

According to media reports, civic rescue organizations and the Italian coast guard saved more than 2,000 refugees from distress yesterday. In the absence of an official marine rescue program and despite the growing aid efforts by civil society organizations, the number of deaths in the Mediterranean has increased in recent years. With more than 5,000 deaths, 2016 marks the deadliest year for refugees in the Mediterranean. The lack of institutional rescue efforts and the on-going tragedy at sea have prompted European civil society, in the form of private aid organizations, to intervene more and more frequently. It is for this reason that SOS MEDITERRANEE was founded. Since February 2016, the European organization comprised of associations in Germany, France and Italy, has been operating a rescue vessel in the Mediterranean. In coordination with the MRCC in Rome, over 11,500 people were rescued from distress and a further 4,900 passengers welcomed on board.

"We will continue to show solidarity with people who seek refuge in Europe. We demand a comprehensive sea rescue program. We also call on all civil society actors to show solidarity with people who are forced to flee from violence and poverty. Our actions are based on the conviction that Europe is a continent where humanity is a principle we actively live by," said Timon Marszalek, Managing Director of SOS MEDITERRANEE Deutschland e.V.

As long as the European Union does not adequately meet its obligation to conduct rescue operations, SOS MEDITERRANEE and other private organizations will continue their efforts in the Mediterranean.

For immediate release. Photo credits: Patrick Bar / SOS MEDITERRANEE. **For more information contact:** Jana Ciernioch | SOS MEDITERRANEE Deutschland e.V. | j.ciernioch@sosmediterranee.org | +49 173 .4071 721