

251 people rescued by SOS MEDITERRANEE- The crossings shift to east of Tripoli: "In Libya, prison guards kill people and throw them into a hole" (Testimony)



The Aquarius, the rescue ship chartered by SOS MEDITERRANEE and operated in partnership with Médecins Sans Frontières, rescued two boats on Sunday, August 27th, in the international waters east of Tripoli. A total of 251 people, including 26 women, 5 children under the age of five, and 29 unaccompanied minors were rescued and brought to safety aboard the Aquarius.

2 rescues, 251 people rescued by NGOs

At 6:30 on Sunday morning, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center Rome (MRCC) requested SOS MEDITERRANEE's Aquarius to search for a boat in distress reported 20 miles off the Libyan coast; noting, however, that the Libyan Coast Guard had first alerted to the presence of this boat, and could take over the rescue operation.

After locating the rubber boat in distress 24 nautical miles from the coast and in the absence of other naval units, Aquarius rescuers proceeded to provide first assistance by distributing life jackets to the 116 people aboard the dinghy.

A large gas leak at the bottom of the dinghy caused severe burns to persons sitting inside the boat and required urgent intervention. Faced with the urgency of the situation and in the absence of nearby Libyan Coast Guard naval units, the MRCC Rome authorized the transfer of the 116 persons to the Aquarius, where the rescued persons were taken care of by the medical staff of MSF.

After successful completion of the first rescue operation, the MRCC notified NGO rescue ships operating in the zone east of Tripoli to the presence of a second boat in distress. Rescue ship Open Arms, operated by NGO ProActiva, spotted the inflatable boat shortly afterwards, distributed life jackets and participated in the transfer of the 135 people to the Aquarius.

SOS MEDITERRANEE is a European organization for the rescue of people in distress at sea. It was founded in 2015 and launched its rescue operations in February 2016. Together with its medical partner Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the organization has assisted more than 20.000 people within its first year of rescue activities.



The 251 people from Mali (63), Sudan (61), Côte d'Ivoire (39), Egypt (18), Ghana (10), and other countries from West Africa and the Horn of Africa are currently safe on board the Aquarius.

Several patients have been taken under the care of Médecins Sans Frontières' medical staff, to treat gasoline burns (people wore fuel drenched clothes), dehydration and injuries related to ill-treatment in Libya.

The crossings shift to east of Tripoli

According to the accounts of the rescued people, the boats left from Khoms, east of Tripoli. "This Sunday's two rescue operations took place in international waters east of Tripoli; while most of the rescues since the beginning of the year had taken place west of Tripoli, off the coast of Sabratha," said Nicola Stalla, SOS MEDITERRANEE's emergency coordinator aboard the Aquarius.

"A temporary decline in crossings in the Central Mediterranean from Libya has been observed since late July, but most NGOs, including SOS MEDITERRANEE, have not stopped their search and rescue activities. This Sunday, the Aquarius and Open Arms saved the lives of 251 people. In one of the dinghies, a gas leak caused severe burns to several passengers. What would have happened to these men, women and children in great distress if the humanitarian ships with medical facilities on board had not been there on time?" said Sophie Beau, vice-president of SOS MEDITERRANEE.

Testimony: "The guards of the prison, they kill people, and they throw them into a hole"

The testimonies given by rescued people describe a situation of extreme violence in Libya, "The whippings happen in the morning, noon and evening. This is our meal," a Senegalese volunteer from SOS MEDITERRANEE was told by a young 20-year-old Cameroonian who spent six months in detention in Libya. "The Libyans beat us all the time, without any reason. They put us in jail without any reason. The guards of the prison, they kill people, and they throw them into a hole. They do not close the hole until it is full of bodies."

"We all suffered so much. All the people you see here have come a very long way. They died inside a long time ago. Even their families must believe they are dead. Today is like resurrection," said the young Cameroonian who explained that he witnessed a scene of torture during which the Libyan guards hit the head of a prisoner hanging by the feet "like a ball."

Call to Europe: "Listening to these testimonies before it is too late"

"The first thing the rescued people speak of when they get on board is not the trauma of the sea crossing. First and foremost they speak of what they call 'Libyan hell': kidnappings, rape, extortion of ransoms under torture, ill-treatment and humiliation, forced labor, slave markets... Migrants are prey to large-scale human trafficking. SOS MEDITERRANEE calls on the European and Mediterranean states to listen to these terrifying testimonies before it is too late and even more people die at sea whilst trying to flee Libya; or are turned back and returned to the hands of their torturers" said Sophie Beau, vice president of SOS MEDITERRANEE.

SOS MEDITERRANEE e.V. ist eine zivilgesellschaftliche, europäische Organisation zur Rettung Schiffbrüchiger im Mittelmeer. Sie hat sich 2015 auf Initiative des Kapitäns Klaus Vogel gegründet. Seit Februar 2016 ist sie gemeinsam mit Ärzte ohne Grenzen mit dem Rettungsschiff MS AQUARIUS im Mittelmeer im Einsatz. In den ersten sechs Monaten konnten bereits über 3.372 Menschen gerettet werden und an Bord versorgt werden. Weitere 2.282 wurden von anderen Rettungsschiffen übernommen und an Bord betreut. Die gemeinnützige Organisation finanziert sich ausschließlich durch Spenden. Spendenkonto: IBAN: DE 04 1005 0000 0190 4184 51 | BIC: BELADEBEXX.



Since the beginning of 2017, the Aquarius has welcomed 11,166 people on board. 8.903 were directly rescued by the SOS MEDITERRANEE teams, 2263 were welcomed on board after a transshipment.

For immediate release.

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