

SOS MEDITERRANEE rescues a boat in distress north of Sabratha // 20 Libyans fleeing Libya, 2 serious medical cases // "It is impossible to live in Libya, it has become too dangerous" (testimony)

Rescuers of the Aquarius, chartered by SOS MEDITERRANEE and operated in partnership with Médecins Sans Frontières, rescued yesterday 20 people in distress in international waters, 25 nautical miles north of the Libyan city of Sabratha.

The 20 people, including 4 women and 5 minors, on board a small fiberglass boat were spotted via radar and binoculars by the rescue team of the Aquarius late Monday morning.

The SAR coordinator of SOS MEDITERRANEE immediately reported that the boat appeared to be in distress to the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (IMRCC). IMRCC stated that the Libyan Coast Guard was coordinating the case.

Faced with the lack of response to repeated telephone calls to the Libyan Coast Guard the SAR coordinator from SOS MEDITERRANEAN asked the MRCC Rome permission to evacuate a child with breathing difficulties and people showing signs of dehydration to the clinic of Aquarius.

The medical cases and their caregivers, and then all the passengers of this boat in distress, were finally transferred on board the Aquarius, in accordance with the maritime law which requires that all vessels render assistance to people in distress at sea.

Two small unidentified fast boats observed the operation remotely without contacting rescuers, without offering assistance to people in distress and without being visibly controlled by the Libyan Coast Guard.

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. Since the beginning of 2017, the Aquarius has welcomed 11.822 people. 9.307 lives that were directly rescued by the teams of SOS MEDITERRANEE, 2.515 were welcomed on board following transshipment.

20 Libyans on the run: "It's impossible to live in Libya, it's too dangerous" (testimony)

"I have not slept for three days. I lost everything, it is impossible to live in Libya, it has become too dangerous," explained a 26 year old Libyan to a volunteer of SOS MEDITERRANEE.

"There is no longer any work in Libya and you risk being attacked permanently. In Tripoli, three people, very young, approached me and pointed a gun on my head. They took my car, my bag, my money. If you say anything, if you talk ... they will kill you," the young man said.

A young couple of graduate students explained to a volunteer from SOS MEDITERRANEE that they had been forced to flee Libya aboard this small boat because of the generalized climate of violence.

"The world must know what is happening in Libya, the situation is dramatic. People are at risk of being killed for nothing, and if nothing happens everyone will die" stated two young Libyans of 20 and 23 years. ",," they told the volunteers of SOS MEDITERRANEE.

On Tuesday and on instruction by MRCC Rome, the Aquarius was steaming at full speed towards Pozzallo in southern Sicily for the medical evacuation of two patients - including a child in need of urgent hospitalization - and the disembarkation of the other rescued in a "port of safety".

"The situation in the Mediterranean is becoming more complex, but a law prevails: the law of the sea obliges to assist to people in distress at sea. It is a legal but also moral obligation for SOS MEDITERRANEE and should be also for all the European and Mediterranean states concerned by this humanitarian crisis which is unfolding at their doors. SOS MEDITERRANEE once again invites European leaders to hear the testimonies of shipwrecked survivors who describe a situation of chaos and daily danger for civilian populations in Libya," said Sophie Beau, vice-president of SOS MEDITERRANEE International.

For immediate release. Photo credits: Anthony Jean

Press contact:

France: Pascale Pessey-Martineau +33 6 09 22 34 55 / p.pessey-martineau@sosmediterranee.org

Germany: Verena Papke +49 30 220 56811/ v.papke@sosmediterranee.org

Italy: Barbara Amodeo +39 351 208 35 68 / b.amodeo@sosmediterranee.org

International: Mathilde Auvillain +39 347 328 24 12 / m.auvillain@sosmediterranee.org

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. Since the beginning of 2017, the Aquarius has welcomed 11.822 people. 9.307 lives that were directly rescued by the teams of SOS MEDITERRANEE, 2.515 were welcomed on board following transshipment.