# *UN refugee agency says immigrant deaths in Mediterranean surpass 2,000 this year*

Geneva, November 7 (RHC)-- The United Nations refugee agency says a total of more than 2,000 refugees have lost their lives since January trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe.

Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said in the Swiss city of Geneva that "the number of lives lost on the Mediterranean this year has now exceeded 2,000" after 17 people were found dead off the Spanish coast this week.

The official noted that the agency "has called repeatedly for urgent action to address this situation."  "The Mediterranean has for several years been the world's deadliest sea route for refugees and migrants.  That it continues to be so should be unacceptable to all."

Yaxley said some 105,000 refugees and asylum-seekers have reached Europe so far this year.  The figure represents a drop to pre-2014 levels. But the drownings this year mean that the rate of deaths has

escalated sharply.

Meanwhile, Joel Millmana, a spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said the UNHCR remains "very concerned about the legal and logistical restrictions that have been placed on a number of NGOs wishing to conduct search and rescue operations" in the Mediterranean.

These included operations by the civilian rescue ship Aquarius, which was chartered by Doctors without Borders, known by the French acronym MSF, and SOS Mediterranee, a European maritime-humanitarian organization.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Millmana said it was the fifth consecutive year that arrivals have topped 100,000.  But he noted that in previous years the threshold was crossed much earlier in the year.

Last year, that figure was reached in July, as it was in 2014. In 2015, arrivals topped 100,000 by June and in 2016 it was in February.

UN figures show Spain was the top destination for refugees this year, with more than 49,000 arrivals by sea, ahead of Greece with more 27,700 and Italy with over 22,160.

Many of the refugees make the perilous crossing on overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels.

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https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/175975-un-refugee-agency-says-immigrant-deaths-in-mediterranean-surpass-2000-this-year

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