

UN launches rescue operation after eight drown off Djibouti coast



The International Organization for Migration says group of 150 were forced off boat by smugglers and made to swim to shore.

A map of Djibouti, on the northeast coast of the Horn of Africa (Al Jazeera)

Yibuti, June 12 (RHC)-- Eight refugees and migrants have died and 22 others are missing after they were forced off a boat near the Djibouti coast, according to the United Nations agency the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In a statement, IOM said the dead and missing were part of a group of 150 others who were forced by smugglers to get off a boat and swim to shore last week on June 5th.

The surviving refugees and migrants were reportedly found in the desert by IOM patrol teams and taken to a response center. The IOM and Djibouti authorities are continuing with a search-and-rescue operation to find the missing.

“Every life lost at sea is a tragedy that should never happen,” said Frantz Celestin, IOM Regional Director for the East, Horn and Southern Africa. Celestin added that those on the boat were “forced into impossible choices by smugglers who show no regard for human life”.

Thousands of refugees and migrants from African, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries, fleeing conflict, persecution, or seeking a better life in Europe, attempt perilous crossings by sea every year.

Smugglers prey upon them, packing often flimsy vessels full of desperate passengers, risking their lives to reach Europe. Most of the vessels get people across the Red Sea to Gulf countries before many try and travel on to European nations.

Yemen is a key route for those from East Africa and the Horn of Africa who are trying to reach Gulf countries to work. Hundreds of thousands attempt the journey each year.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and NEWS AGENCIES]

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