

Smugglers throw hundreds of African migrants off boats headed to Yemen – UN

10 August 2017 – A total of 300 migrants have reportedly been forced from boats over the past two days by smugglers off the coast of Yemen – many feared dead or missing, the United Nations migration agency has reported.

“The survivors told our colleagues on the beach that the smuggler [pushed them into the sea](#) when he saw some ‘authority types’ near the coast,” said Laurent de Boeck, the Yemen Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)).

“They also told us that the smuggler has already returned to Somalia to continue his business and pick up more migrants to bring to Yemen on the same route. This is shocking and inhumane. The suffering of migrants on this migration route is enormous. Too many young people pay smugglers with the false hope of a better future,” Mr. de Boeck added.

According to IOM, up to 180 migrants were reportedly thrown into the sea from a boat today by the smugglers. Five bodies have been recovered so far, and around 50 are reported missing.

This latest incident comes barely 24 hours after smugglers forced more than 120 Somali and Ethiopian migrants into the sea as they approached the coast of Shabwa, a Yemeni Governorate along the Arabian Sea, resulting in the drowning of around 50 migrants. The migrants had been hoping to reach countries in the Gulf via war-torn Yemen.

Shortly after yesterday’s tragedy, IOM staff found the shallow graves of 29 migrants on a beach in Shabwa, during a routine patrol. The dead had been quickly buried by those who survived the smuggler’s deadly actions. The approximate average age of the passengers on the boat was 16.

AUDIO: IOM spokesperson Olivia Headon says that people traffickers often dupe their predominantly teenage victims into making the perilous sea crossing. Credit: UN News

“The Secretary-General is heart-broken by this continuing tragedy,” his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at the daily briefing in New York.

“This is why he continues to stress that the international community must give priority to preventing and resolving a variety of situations which both generate mass movement and expose those already on the move to significant danger,” he added, underscoring the need to increase legal pathways for regular migration and offer credible alternatives to these dangerous crossings for people in need of international protection.

Since January of this year, IOM estimates that around 55,000 migrants left the Horn of Africa to come to Yemen, most with the aim of trying to find better opportunities in the Gulf countries. More than 30,000 of those migrants are under the age of 18 from Somalia and Ethiopia, while a third are estimated to be female.

This journey is especially hazardous during the current windy season in the Indian Ocean. Smugglers are active in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, offering fake promises to vulnerable migrants. IOM and its partners operate across the region to support these migrants and provide lifesaving assistance to those who find themselves abused or stranded along the route.