

Tragic start to New Year for migrants as hundreds feared dead in Mediterranean – UN

10 January 2018 – A little more than a week into the New Year, reports reveal that close to 200 migrants or refugees have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean Sea – with up to 100 unaccounted for since Saturday, the United Nations migration agency said Wednesday.

“It’s very distressing that during the first 10 days of 2018 we have seen close to [800 migrants rescued or intercepted](#) off the Libyan coast, with more lives lost at sea,” said Othman Belbeisi, Chief of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Libya Mission.

“More has to be done to reduce irregular unsafe movements of people along the Central Mediterranean route,” he added.

By contrast, at a time when Mediterranean migrants’ death dropped sharply, IOM recorded only 26 on the Mediterranean Sea lanes in December.

While January 2017 had witnessed some 254 deaths, this week’s reports suggest that the start of 2018 may be even deadlier.

IOM reported on Tuesday that 81 Mediterranean Sea deaths of migrants or refugees were recorded in the [first eight days of the year](#) – five in Western Mediterranean waters off Spain and Morocco, the rest between Italy and Libya.

In the latest, and third deadliest, shipwreck in the Mediterranean since Saturday, the Libyan Coast Guard [rescued](#) three rubber boats with 279 migrants – 19 women, 243 men, 13 boys and four girls – in an operation lasting at least 12 hours.

According to survivors, and a press release by Libya’s Coast Guard, about 100 people on board remained missing.

IOM was present at the disembarkation point in Tripoli and provided the survivors with food and water.

IOM’s Christine Petré reported that the boats departed from the coastal towns of Azzawiyah and Al Khums – with most of the survivors hailing from African countries, including Senegal, Mali and Nigeria. The Libyan Coast Guard reported that eight are from Bangladesh while two are from Pakistan.

The UN migration agency continues to provide support and direct humanitarian assistance to the survivors of this latest tragedy, many of whom now are at Libya’s Tajoura detention centre.