

# UN refugee agency stresses importance of search missions after latest shipwreck in Europe

30 March 2017 – With nearly 150 people dead or missing in another shipwreck off the Mediterranean coast, the United Nations refugee agency today stressed the importance of saving lives at sea.

“This latest tragedy comes as a stark reminder of the vital importance of robust search and rescue capacities,” said Volker Türk, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

A 16-year old boy is believed to be the [only survivor](#) of the boat that sunk with 147 passengers, including five children and several pregnant women, UNHCR said.

“The 16-year old survivor said their boat left two days ago from Sabratha, in Libya, and started taking on water after a few hours of navigation,” the UN agency said after interviewing the boy in Lampedusa.

“He survived the shipwreck by hanging to a fuel tank, until he was rescued by a Spanish ship operating under Operation Sophia,” UNHCR noted in reference to the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) operations launched after the April 2015 Libya migrant shipwrecks.

In the statement, Mr. Türk expressed deep sadness at the news of the deaths.

He commended the action of the Italian Coast Guard in coordination with Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

The senior UN official also noted the importance of non-governmental organizations, which provide additional and “much needed” rescue capacity. According to UNHCR figures, NGOs performed 26 per cent of rescue operations in the central Mediterranean in 2016.

“Saving lives at sea must remain the key priority for all,” Mr. Türk said.

In September 2016, when Member States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Governments committed to intensifying international cooperation on strengthening search and rescue.