

UN reports more than 300 migrant deaths on Mediterranean crossing in first two months of 2017

24 February 2017 – An estimated 366 migrants died at sea during their Mediterranean journey to Europe in the first 53 days of 2017, down from 425 of the comparable period of last year, the United Nations migration agency said today.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reported that 13,924 migrants entered Europe by sea through 22 February, sharply down from 105,427 a year earlier.

These data include the death toll reported this week from a boat with as many as 133 passengers on board that foundered off Az Zawiyah, near Tripoli on this past Sunday.

According to an IOM source at the scene, the human smugglers stole the craft's engine and left the vessel drifting, telling passengers that authorities were *en route* to rescue them. "This is becoming a common tactic," said IOM Rome spokesman Flavio Di Giacomo. "But when you take an engine from a boat like this, you can no longer treat it as an 'incident.' It is homicide."

This year so far, Italy accounted for 10,701 arrivals, Greece 2,223 and Spain 1,000. In the comparable period last year, Greece recorded 97,325 arrivals and Italy 8,102.

To date in 2017, an estimated 326 migrants died during their deadly journey on the Mediterranean's central route linking Libya to Italy, compared with only two deaths on the Mediterranean's east corridor to Greece.