

# **Libyans shooting Sub-Saharan African refugees seeking to escape war-torn country**

*Libyan gunmen are reportedly shooting sub-Saharan refugees who seek to escape Libya by boat, according to a report in the UK newspaper The Independent.*

*A Rome-based Eritrean priest, Father Mussie Zerai, told the paper that according to his contacts in Tripoli the bodies of sub-Saharan refugees who sought to flee Libya by boats were found washed back ashore with gunshot wounds.*

*“There are five bodies in total, two women, two boys and an Egyptian who we believe was the boat’s captain,” Zerai said. “Their bodies have gunshot wounds in them. Somebody shot them after they left Libya.”*

*These people might have been part of a group of 335 Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants who sailed from Tajura, Libya on March 22 and seemingly vanished without a trace.*

*Last week, a total of 60 bodies washed ashore on the Libyan coast.*

Zerai tracks the movement of migrants who cross the Mediterranean. His contacts in Libya include Eritrean immigrants who live there as well as Monsignor Giovanni Martinelli, the Catholic bishop of Tripoli.

It is not clear who might have murdered the migrants and no photos of the dead bodies have yet surfaced.

While most of the migrants fleeing North Africa have been young Tunisian men who crossed the short distance to the Italian island of Lampedusa, more vessels are coming from Libya which represents a longer and more perilous journey.

A migrant boat which capsized 40 miles off Lampedusa is believed to have contained refugees from Somalia and Sudan. At least two other boats which left Libya carrying sub-Saharan Africans have also gone missing.

“These tragedies in the sea highlight the lack of rescue plans for refugees,” Dario Picciau from Everyone Group, an Italian human rights body, told the Independent.

“This is a murky affair which must be investigated.”

Meanwhile, black Africans who remain trapped in Libya face a litany of dangers, including suspicions by Libyans that they were hired as

*mercenaries by Gaddafi to shoot and kill civilians. To make matters worse, many of these host nations have done little to repatriate them,*

*“These were entirely preventable deaths,” Zerai said. “They could have been avoided if only Europe had heeded our pleas before the bombing began when we asked for the emergency evacuation of all refugees trapped on Libyan cities. So far only Italy has taken steps to evacuate around 110 refugees from Tripoli. Other European countries have preferred to take their time. As the refugees get more desperate they resort to making a dangerous journey across the Mediterranean on boats filled with desperate people hoping to rebuild their lives.”*