

The plight of the refugees on Lampedusa: a desperate cry for help

Lampedusa, March 25th, 2011.

Sub-Saharan refugees have had to pay a higher price than anyone else to get on a boat of hope, after waiting their turn that was long in coming. Unable to reach Tunisia because of racial persecution throughout Libya from the rebels and the crackdown by those loyal to Gaddafi (which prevents the refugees escaping from Libya), two days ago, they were finally packed like sardines into a boat leaving from the port of Tripoli: 330 people, including women and children. Unfortunately, this boat has gone missing, despite the UN High Commissioner for Refugees still holding a hope for their safety, because one of the women on the boat called her sister - who lives in Sicily - on her mobile phone.

EveryOne Group has alerted the Italian authorities to patrol - from the air too - the stretch of sea between Lampedusa and Tripoli, in the hope of spotting the boat, which is probably damaged. Meanwhile, unscrupulous people are turning the refugees' tragedy into a lucrative business. They are charging each refugee

€ 1000/1500 to get on one of the decrepit boats and undertake the journey of hope from the Tunisian coast. According to information that still needs to be verified, Italian organized crime is involved in this shameful trafficking in human beings, providing boats and logistical support to Tunisian smugglers. To leave without the consent of the traffickers has an even higher price, as seen in the recent sinking of a vessel, which killed at least 35 refugees, after - according to the survivors – it was rammed by a patrol boat of the Tunisian Coast Guard".

A human being who undertakes such a journey," a Tunisian immigrant told a humanitarian worker present on Lampedusa, "is not an illegal immigrant looking for work, he's someone who may be killed if he remains in Tunisia, and therefore has nothing to lose. I hope the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees understands this terrible reality and does not allow them to deport us back to Tunisia. When there is peace in Tunisia, we will be the first to want to go home, where our loved ones, our friends and our lives are."