

Bodies of at least 95 refugees found on Libyan shores

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The bodies of at least 95 refugees have been found washed ashore in Libya over the past week according to the country's Red Crescent charity, in the latest tragedies stemming from the region's unprecedented refugee crisis.

The charity's Libyan spokesman, Mohamed al-Masrati, said on Sunday that 85 bodies had been found near the country's capital, Tripoli, while 10 had been discovered near Sabartha, a coastal town that is the point of departure for many refugee boats bound for Europe.

Most of the dead are reported to have been travelling from other African countries, while al-Masrati said that search efforts for other bodies were continuing.

Similar disasters, with unseaworthy boats transporting refugees along the Mediterranean coast sinking or capsizing have become a weekly occurrence. According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 2,600 migrants have died this year in the Mediterranean, with many drowning off the coast of Libya.

The recent deaths are part of a broader surge of refugees seeking to reach Europe via Libya. According to the Italian coastguard, over 4,500 refugees were rescued in the course of just one day on September 19 off the Libyan coast. On September 28, Italian authorities claimed to have coordinated the rescue of another 1,151 refugees.

The refugee crisis, which has seen millions flee their homes, and undertake a perilous journey to Europe, is a product of military interventions and wars in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa spearheaded by the United States and the major imperialist powers in Europe.

Many of those fleeing to Libya on their way to Europe hail from strife-torn African states such as

Eritrea and Somalia, which have been devastated by decades of imperialist intrigues, sanctions, and conflicts.

According to the UN, by mid-2014 some 360,000 Eritreans had been classified as refugees, out of a population of just 6.3 million, with hundreds of thousands fleeing brutal government repression and starvation level poverty. The country's average per capita income is just \$550 a year.

At the same time, US-NATO regime change operations in Libya and Syria have created millions more refugees, while destabilizing the entire region. Since 2012, over three million Syrians have fled the country, while as many as 7.6 million more are internally displaced.

The destabilization of Libya has created a similar crisis. According to al-Masrati, "Up to today there are more than 550,000 internally displaced people in Libya due to the current conflict in Benghazi and other places, and we believe this number will increase to at least 600,000."

The UN estimates that approximately 2.44 million people in Libya, almost 40 percent of the country's population, require protection or humanitarian assistance, and that over 3 million people have been affected by armed conflict. Of those who have been displaced, some 100,000 are thought to live in outdoor camps, or abandoned buildings, while school enrolment rates have dropped by as much as 21 percent for boys, and 17 percent for girls.

In 2011, the major powers, led by the US and NATO stoked a civil war in Libya, aimed at the ousting of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

As part of this operation, an unstable coalition of opposition forces made up of Islamists, regime defectors, and western intelligence assets was armed,

funded, and trained by the major powers, while the UN authorized the imposition of a “no-fly” zone which initiated a bombing campaign involving NATO, the US, France, Britain, Italy and a host of smaller European states. In the course of just over seven months, NATO flew more than 26,000 sorties over Libya, creating a widespread humanitarian crisis that continues to the present.

Since the murder of Gaddafi by US-backed rebels in October 2011, and the overthrow of his regime, attempts to establish a pliant Western-backed government have largely failed, with ongoing fighting between Islamist militias, and regional warlords.

The political turmoil has created a situation in which two rival governments vie for authority and influence, with an internationally recognized government sitting in Tobruk, in the country’s east, supported by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, and a rival Islamist body headquartered in Tripoli, reputedly backed by Qatar, Turkey and Sudan.

UN brokered talks aimed at the creation of a “national unity” government have repeatedly broken down, while amid the turmoil, the Islamic State has reportedly gained footholds along the country’s Mediterranean coast.

Refugees who arrive in Libya are liable to be detained, tortured, and abused, either by government authorities, or the many armed militias in the country. A “Human Rights Watch” report in June found that as many as 6,000 refugees were forced into overcrowded detention centers, with virtually no sanitation.

According to the report, detainees were subjected to beatings, electric shocks, whippings, strip-searches, being hung upside down from trees, and sexual assaults. Women and children were among those targeted for abuse.

The response of the major imperialist powers to the deepening refugee crisis that their own policies have created, has been a brutal crackdown against refugees, aimed at preventing them from gaining asylum. Governments throughout Europe have sought to close their borders, while mobilizing police and military forces to block asylum-seekers.

In May, the European Union outlined plans to begin bombing targets within Libya, targeting so-called “people smugglers.” The proposal includes the targeting of docked refugee boats, in a bid to prevent

asylum seekers from even beginning their journey to Europe.

The EU has escalated its campaign against asylum seekers, with the announcement that from October 7, a force of 1,300 military personnel from 22 European countries will have the power to “board, search, seize and divert vessels suspected of being used for people smuggling.” According to reports, the force will include an Italian aircraft carrier and military aircraft for surveillance, and will likely involve airborne drones and submarines.



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