

Beat: News

75 migrants feared dead in latest boat tragedy off Italy

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USPA News - About 75 migrants who were attempting to travel by boat from the North African coast to Italy are feared to have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, according to survivors who were rescued by the Italian Navy, the UN's refugee agency said on Wednesday. The survivors, a group of 27 people, were rescued by Italian Navy vessels over the weekend and taken to Catania as part of Operation Mare Nostrum.

They informed authorities that approximately 75 others were also on board their boat when it left Africa but were lost at sea during their desperate attempt to reach Europe. Survivors from another boat told authorities that two people on their boat had also died while four more were lost at sea, raising the total number of missing to around 80. It adds to the 45 men, all of sub-Saharan origin, who were discovered dead inside the hold of an overloaded boat off Italy on Sunday afternoon. They allegedly died of asphyxiation, 566 others were rescued. Overall, the Italian Navy rescued more than 5,000 migrants over the weekend, demonstrating the enormous refugee crisis Italy is faced with as tens of thousands continue to attempt the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea. "Without the Navy's invaluable assistance the number of victims would undoubtedly be higher," the UN refugee agency UNHCR said in a statement on Wednesday. The UN refugee agency called on governments to provide legal alternatives to ensure desperate people in need of refuge can seek and find protection and asylum. "These further tragedies demonstrate that refugees have no other option but to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean to seek refuge from war and persecution," the agency said. So far this year, the Italian Navy has rescued more than 60,000 people at sea, most of them fleeing the raging civil war in Syria. The number of those rescued as part of the operation will soon surpass the record 63,000 migrants who were rescued by Italy in 2011 at the height of the Arab Spring.

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