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Italy: More than 100 migrants die in second horrific shipwreck this week

The Italian authorities and the European Union must redouble efforts to patrol their shores and assist migrants in order to prevent further tragic loss of life, Amnesty International said after at least 100 people, including children, perished off the coast of Italy on Thursday morning.

The boat – which was reportedly from Libya – was apparently carrying more than 500 migrants, mainly from Eritrea and Somalia, when it caught fire and sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa. Around 120 people have been rescued and more than 100 bodies have so far been brought to shore. Many more are still missing.

“The waters around the small island of Lampedusa have again tragically become a graveyard for migrants. These grim events keep repeating themselves as thousands of people make the perilous trip across the Mediterranean to seek protection or a better life,” said Jezerca Tigani, deputy director of Amnesty International’s Europe and Central Asia Programme.

“It is high time the Italian authorities and the EU increase their search-and-rescue capacity and co-operation in the Mediterranean Sea, rather than concentrating resources on closing off the borders. More must be done to prevent further loss of life in the future.”

Survivors have described the horrific ordeal they endured in this latest tragedy – dead bodies floating in the water as crews from fishing vessels frantically tried to rescue the living.

Another boat carrying more than 460 migrants arrived in Lampedusa shortly before today’s shipwreck. Those on board are now housed at the island’s centre for migrants, which currently hosts some 700 people.

This is the second shipwreck of a migrant boat off Italy’s coast this week.

On 30 September, 13 mostly Eritrean migrants drowned when the boat carrying them ran aground off Ragusa in Sicily. The traffickers (scafisti) on board the sinking vessel reportedly forced the migrants to jump to their deaths in the sea by whipping them and threatening them with knives.