

AI Index: PRE 01/541/2013
11 October 2013

Egypt: Boat sinking underlines wider tragedy for refugees from Syria

Today's shipwreck off the coast of Alexandria that drowned at least 12 people, many believed to be refugees from Syria, highlights the crushing life-and-death decisions facing many who fled to Egypt to escape Syria's armed conflict, Amnesty International said.

The organization is due to launch a briefing next week on the plight of refugees from Syria in Egypt, and currently has a delegation on the ground researching the situation.

"Our research has shown how the backdrop to today's terrible boat accident is a much wider tragedy. Refugees from Syria are compelled to risk life and limb yet again in Egypt after facing arbitrary arrests, detentions and increased hostility," said Sherif Elsayed-Ali, Amnesty International's Head of Refugee and Migrants' Rights.

"Refugees from Syria have fled the depths of despair to seek safety in Egypt. But instead of providing shelter and hope for a new life, the Egyptian authorities' actions are compelling many refugees from Syria into life-threatening situations, including entrusting their lives to smugglers in order to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea."

According to media reports, at least 100 people were rescued from today's shipwreck and taken to a naval base and then to a police station in Alexandria. It is unknown what will happen to them next.

A second boat carrying migrants from Tunisia to Italy also reportedly sank off the coast of the island of Lampedusa today.

The shipwrecks come just a week after another tragic sinking off the coast of Lampedusa in Italy, in which more than 100 migrants and asylum-seekers – mainly Eritreans and Somalis – were killed when the overcrowded vessel carrying them sank after reportedly catching fire.