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By Silvia Fernández
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Ten more lives lost on the world's deadliest migration route



Sources: MSF

MSF's search and rescue team found 10 people dead yesterday in a wooden boat in the central Mediterranean after another 186 were rescued in 24 hours.

Central Mediterranean, 17 November 2021 – On 16 November, during a difficult search and rescue operation less than 30 nautical miles off the Libyan coast in the central Mediterranean, the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) team aboard the search and rescue

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vessel Geo Barents found **10 people dead on the lower deck of a crowded wooden boat**. Following Alerts from Alarm Phone* and Seabird**, indicating that the ship in distress was getting water, the Geo Barents arrived at the vessel too late to avoid tragedy.

Selection of photographs of the latest

rescues of the Geo Barents Broll with images of the latest rescues of the Geo

Barents Totals of Candida Lobes, member of the MSF team on board the Geo Barents (in Italian)

During a complicated evening rescue, after multiple rescue operations at sea, the survivors of the wooden boat informed the MSF team that there were more people crammed into the lower deck, who did not respond when spoken to. **When the 99 survivors are already safe aboard the Geo Barents, the rescue team found the bodies of 10 people**. Survivors explained to the MSF team that these people had spent more than 13 hours on the narrow lower deck of the boat, with a strong smell of intoxicating fuel; **it is believed that people died asphyxiated**.

"After rescuing the 99 people, we have seen the 10 bodies at the bottom," says Fulvia Conte, deputy coordinator of MSF's search and rescue team aboard the Geo Barents. **"It took us almost two hours to retrieve them and bring them on board, so they can have a dignified burial once they reach land.** It was horrible and insperancing at the same time," Conte says. "This is another tragedy at sea that could have been avoided."

Abdoulaye*** was one of the last survivors to abandon the wooden ship. He barely had time to understand what happened to his fellow travellers before MSF rescuers grabbed his arm and helped him get on the lifeboat. "Let me see their bodies. These are my brothers, we come from the same place, we went through Libya together," Abdoulaye asked as soon as he arrived at the Geo Barents. **"I need to tell their families that they are dead. Please let me see you."** His voice and body were trembling, and his gaze was still on the horizon.

In less than **24 hours, on 15 and 16 November, the MSF team carried out three rescues** in the search and rescue areas of Malta and Libya, in international waters,

bringing **186 people safely aboard the Geo Barents**. Among the survivors are **152 men and 34 women, of whom 61 are minors**. There are several women with young children, the youngest being only 10 months old. The people on board come from a variety of countries, including Guinea, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Somalia and Syria. Many of them have had hard experiences in Libya, where their small wooden boat departed.

Although they cried with relief and joy when they arrived aboard the Geo Barents, **they show signs of acute stress and trauma**. Most people are terrified after the perilous journey. Among the survivors, some had **to identify the body of a younger brother or friend who died** in front of their eyes a few hours earlier.

"On a day like this, when we have to bring 10 bodies on board, we are once again witnessing **Europe's unwillingness to provide dedicated and proactive search and rescue work that is so much needed in the central Mediterranean**," says Caroline Willemen, project coordinator at Geo Barents. "People endure horrific human rights abuses in Libya and often their only escape is to flee and embark on an incredibly dangerous journey across the central Mediterranean."

"It's become the deadliest migration route and it's shameful," Willemen says. "With 186 survivors on board, including relatives of some of the deceased, and people who traveled for hours on the lower deck of the ship among corpses, **the Geo Barents will urgently search for a safe harbor to disembark this group of extremely stressed and traumatized people.**"

Since launching search and rescue activities in 2015, MSF has sent medical teams aboard eight rescue ships, sometimes operating in partnership with other organisations. In total, our search and rescue teams have helped more than 82,000 people. The Geo Barents is the search and rescue vessel chartered by our organization and we started operating with it in May 2021. The ship is currently at sea for its fifth mission. An estimated 1,225 people have died or gone missing while attempting the perilous journey across the central Mediterranean so far this year. Today we add 10 more people to this terribly high number. Some 22,825 people have disappeared or died on this same route since 2014.

** Alarm number to help people in danger at sea*

*** Civilian aerial reconnaissance mission in the central Mediterranean.*

The name was changed for protection reasons.

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Source: <https://msf-spain.prezly.com/diez-vidas-mas-perdidas-en-la-ruta-migratoria-mas-mortifera-del-mundo>

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