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Incident Report

21/10/2016

General Comment

The present report refers to the aggressive interference by the Libyan Coastguard in a rescue operation coordinated by MRCC and involving Sea-Watch 2 unit and tanker vessel OKYROE.

The aggressive behaviour of the Libyan Coastguards led to a situation of mass panic aboard the migrant vessel. The rough movements and the physical interference of the Libyan Coastguard on the rubber boat caused the deflation of a tube and a consequent situation of mass POB where an indefinite number of people died of drowning.

Sea-Watch managed to rescue 124 people and to recover 4 corpses. Throughout the day Sea-Watch carried out the rescue and transfer to other units of 939 people. The exact number of casualties, all related to the incident, is unknown.

The Libyan Coastguard vessel carried roughly 15 crewmembers on board. The boat was loaded with weapons and a machine gun with an operator behind it.

No weapon has been used against the migrants nor the units involved.

Nonetheless the Libyan Coastguard treated the migrants inhumanely, by harassing them verbally, and physically as witnessed by Sea-Watch 2 crew on scene.

The Libyan Coastguard also operated aggressive manoeuvres when approaching Sea-Watch 2 and its RHIBs.

No communication was possible between Sea-Watch 2 and the Libyan Coastguard, due to language barriers.

The rescue took place 14,5 nm from the coast, outside Libyan TTW, as reported in the course pattern annexed.

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Conclusion

Sea-Watch considers that the behaviour of the Libyan Coastguard:

- Led to unnecessary loss of life;

- Represents a blatant violation of the prohibition of torture and inhuman and **degrading treatment** as enshrined in International Law;

- Deliberately created a situation of danger and mass panic, exacerbating the already delicate circumstances of the rescue operation;

- Interfered in a rescue operation by failing in their duty as S \R authority to provide **assistance to the** people in distress, by showing an unjustified violent behaviour, by refusing to **collaborate with the** OSC to bring the rescue operation at an end in the safest way possible, by provoking.

In light of this incident, we demand the EU to reflect upon the planned training of the Libyan Coastguard, when this includes self-styled authorities operating in a manner that represents a blatant violation of international maritime and human rights law.

The EU strategy to empower the Libyan Coastguard should focus on ensuring that the latter performs its duty in respect of the laws and standards applicable to search and rescue, rather than on increasing the capacity to forcibly return people in their attempt to flee to Europe.

Operations Log Book

0015 Call received from MRCC Rome informing about a rubber boat in distress (hereafter cited as « target (1) »).

0022 Call received from MRCC Rome indicating the position of the target, and the **position of a** nearby vessel (tanker) that could assist.

MRCC informs that ITCG asset CP920 SV Bruno Gregoretti is also in the vicinity.

0051 Call received from MRCC repeating the position of the target (1).

Confirmation that tanker vessel OKYROE will support the rescue operation.

New information concerning distress situation: 134 people on board.

0130 Visual contact from bridge with OKYROE.

0137 Call received from MRCC indicating new position of the target (1).

SEA-WATCH 2 approaches.

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0210 OKYROE has a first visual contact with the target (1) and informs the Italian Coastguard through VHF radio, Channel 16.

0230 Sea-Watch 2 reaches the position of the boat in distress.

33°03.85′ N 012°25.29′ E.

Sea-Watch 2 positions itself having the rubber boat in the front (slightly starboard), at around 100 mt distance.

The crew is ready to start the rescue procedure. A spotlight is pointed from the mothership in the direction of the migrant boat.

0242 Launch of RHIB 1 and RHIB 2.

Decision has been taken that the GOLFO AZZURRO takes over a spotted wooden boat in distress.

Visually, Sea-Watch 2 counts between 150 and 160 people on board. The boat is filled with men and 2-3 male underage kids.

Sea-Watch Tender 1 (driver, communicator and doctor on board) approaches the rubber boat. They communicate to the migrants and get ready to start distributing lifejackets.

0250 A Libyan Coastguard patrol vessel approached the rescue operation from South-East, at a speed that created turbulences affecting the rescue procedure initiated by Sea-Watch 2 RHIB 1 (first communication).

Sea-Watch 2 Head of Mission Ingo Werth calls MRCC Rome through satellite phone to inform about the approach of the Libyan Coastguard vessel.

0253 Sea-Watch 2 RHIB 2 leaves towards the rubber boat to start handling life jackets.

0259 The Libyan Coastguard comes alongside the Sea-Watch 2 from portside, then turns to Sea-Watch 2 starboard side, and positions itself at 5-10 mt distance from Sea-Watch 2. They have the rubber boat right in front.

0300 Sea-Watch 2 Head of Mission Ingo Werth attempts to establish communication talking through a megaphone. He informs about Sea-Watch 2 identity and mandate and that Sea-Watch 2 is operating under MRCC Rome coordination for the rescue in question.

The communication is not successful due to language barriers. Arabic is said to be the only language spoken aboard of the Libyan Coastguard's vessel and Sea-Watch 2 lacks Arabic speakers. The general attitude of the crew aboard the Libyan Coastguard vessel is non collaborative and rather rough.

The Libyan Coastguard shouts the words "migrants", then repeatedly "out, out!", accompanied by hand gesture, easily interpretable as a request to leave and move out of the rescue area.

0304 The Libyan Coastguard vessel abandons communication position and approaches the rubber boat straight ahead.

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0305   The Libyan Coastguard vessel turns over starboard side and approaches aggressively Sea-Watch 2 RHIB 2 with its stern, probably to scare it away. RHIB 2 takes off from the stern of the rubber boat.

Sea-Watch 2 Captain communicates to both RHIBs through VHF radio Channel 72 to drive away from the rubber boat. RHIB 1, which has started distributing lifejackets, follows the order, letting the Libyan Coastguard take over.

0308   Sea-Watch 2 RHIBs positioned themselves respectively at starboard (RHIB 2) and portside (RHIB 1) of the rubber boat.

Meanwhile, Sea-Watch 2 Head of Mission Ingo Werth calls MRCC Rome through satellite phone and provides sitrep. Mr Werth asked for recommendation on how to proceed. MRCC asked information about the Libyan Coastguard approach and their attitude, and whether they were armed. MRCC to remain on standby in position and to eventually proceed with the rescue.

0308   The Libyan Coastguard approached the rubber boat with their stern at the bow of the rubber boat.

0311   They throw a rope to the rubber boat from their stern to the latter's bow. They order   the migrants to hold on the rope tight, to be able to keep the rubber boat as close as possible to the Libyan Coastguard vessel.

One of the crewmembers of the Libyan Coastguard jumps on board of the rubber boat and walks all the way through it from bow to stern, kicking and stepping over people.

0312   Once reached the stern, he controls the holding of the engine. He hits people on portside with an unidentified object (rope, stick or cable).

0312-0315 The Libyan Coastguard crewmember starts the engine. He drives the rubber boat alongside the Libyan Coastguard vessel. He turns it around bow to stern.

The Libyan Coastguard crewmembers have an aggressive attitude towards the migrants. As a result of spread of panic 1 person jumps over board and swims to RHIB 1. Sea-Watch 2 RHIB 1 recovers the person on board. RHIB 1 goes alongside Sea-Watch 2, in a safer position.

0320   The Libyan Coastguard vessel left the scene at high speed and turned all lights off.

0323   Sea-Watch RHIBs 1 and 2 are safe on the portside of Sea-Watch 2.

Sea-Watch 2 remains on standby for a few minutes, observing the movement of the Libyan Coastguard vessel on radar, to determine whether the Libyan Coastguard has left the scene only temporarily or permanently.

0324   The rubber boat is still floating, drifting ahead of the bow of Sea-Watch 2.

3 more people jump over board as a result of spreading panic. Sea-Watch RHIB 1 recovers them on board together with the one previously rescued.

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When the Libyan Coastguard vessel has reached 2.5 nm distance, Sea-Watch 2 decides to proceed with the rescue operation, of Sea-Watch 2.

The people in the rubber boat start shouting for help. The circumstances render it difficult to have a clear understanding of the reason of the agitation, but it becomes clear that there is a serious distress situation.

Meanwhile, ITCG CP 920 SV Bruno Gregoretti calls Sea-Watch 2 on VHF radio Channel 16 relaying the order from MRCC to retreat from the rescue zone and head North.

Sea-Watch 2 Captain replies in negative form to the order of MRCC, communicating that the rubber boat is in serious distress.

0325   The Sea-Watch 2 crew observes that the tube in the front of the rubber boat is deflating. The panic on board intensifies and leads many people to fall or jump over board. The boat is clearly sinking.

0327   Immediately a « Mayday » call on VHF radio, Channel 16, warning all ships about the sinking rubber boat and people drowning beside the position of Sea-Watch 2.

As there are around 150 people at risk of drowning, Sea-Watch proceeds to apply mass POB procedure.

0330   Sea-Watch 2 deploys centifloats, which are towed by Sea-Watch 2 RHIB 1 to the rubber boat.

0331   Sea-Watch 2 Captain manœuvres the ship very close to the rubber boat. Many people are swimming/drowning.

Some people climb on board of Sea-Watch 2, life jackets and all possible floating devices as well as ropes are thrown in the water by the crew for people to hang on and POB rescue procedure is carried out by the RHIBs, including 2 CPR (1 successful and 1 not) aboard respectively RHIB 1 and 2.

0430   following a conversation on VHF Channel 16 between Sea-Watch and BRF NGO SAR asset Golfo Azzurro, where the latter offered to send a RHIB to assist Sea-Watch, ITCG CP 920 SV Bruno Gregoretti informs on VHF to be heading towards Sea-Watch 2 position to assist in the rescue operation. ITCG CP920 SV Bruno Gregoretti never reached the rescue position as it found itself involved in further rescue operations on the way.

0445   Sea-Watch 2 updates MRCC Rome about the rescue operation and the intention to head North once the operation is deemed concluded.

Sea-Watch 2 briefly looks for a rafting boat containing life-jackets which has been lost during the rescue operation, yet soon decides to stop the search to sail towards a safer area.

0515   Sea-Watch 2 starts heading North.

Until 0515, Sea-Watch 2 continues from static position to search for survivors with search-light and RHIBs around Sea-Watch 2. When sure that no one still alive could be found, Sea-Watch 2 starts heading North to safer waters.
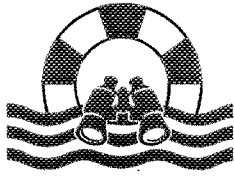
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A comprehensive overview of the situation during the rescue has been rendered impossible by the scarce visibility, being the operation carried out before sunrise.

Both Sea-Watch tenders have done their possible to rescue all the people from drowning. 124 people have been transferred on board of Sea-Watch 2. The crew estimated between 20-30 people to have drowned. The crew has been able to recover 4 dead bodies, which have been brought on board of the Sea-Watch 2.

0700 MRCC Rome communicates about a wooden boat has been found with 14 people on board. Case: 1584

0735 VHF radio call by Irish Warship LE Samuel Beckett, warning ships in the vicinity about sighting of the Libyan Coastguard vessel.

0740 Passengers of the wooden boat have been transferred on board of Sea-Watch 2.

0820 Sea-Watch 2 proceeds towards tanker vessel OKYROE to transfer migrants on the latter.

0915 Message received from OKYROE on VHF radio to send Sea-Watch 2 RHIBs to assist with newly spotted rubber boats (targets 2 and 3) and inform the people on board that they will be transferred to the tanker vessel with our help.

0945 Successful attempt to tow targets 2 and 3 towards OKYROE for transfer.

1019 New target has been spotted (4)

Position: N33°10' E12°20'

1040 Both Sea-Watch 2 Tenders are assisting the tanker with the transfer.

Libyan fishermen with Libyan and white flag on their stern assist the Sea-Watch 2 Tenders with the transfer of the targets to OKYROE.

1116 Four more targets spotted in the vicinity of the current rescue zone (targets 5-6-7-8).

1147 The SAR NGO asset AQUARIUS informs to be heading towards Sea-Watch to assist.

1155 Engine fishers / fishermen are assisting with the towing of the targets towards the OKYROE.

1221 On the starboard side of the OKYROE, the rubber boat that is being transferred seems to be losing air in the tubes.

Tender 2 distributes lifejackets to target (4).

1248 Call received from SV BRUNO GREGORETTI having 800 people on board waiting for the advice of MRCC Rome regarding the next actions, since they have reached full capacity and cannot receive the people on board of Sea-Watch 2.

1255 Target (4) is being towed to OKYROE.

1300 Target (4) unloading migrants to OKYROE.

1359 Target (5) is being handed life jackets, while very close to the vessel of transfer.

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The Spanish TUG boat CAPO FARO is standing by, sent by MRCC to assist.

1544 At least 200 people on board of Sea-Watch 2.

1605 All rubber boats have been attended and their passengers transferred.

Sea-Watch 2 is waiting to transfer the people it has on board.

1804 The same vessel from Libyan Coastguard reappears at around 21 nautical miles from the coastline.

They are pushed away by the speedboat coming from a Spanish warship.

The Spanish warship and its RHIB stayed close to Sea-Watch 2 until the end of operations.

1905 All persons have been rescued from all targets (except for the drowned casualties) and transferred to OKYROE.

The passengers on board Sea-Watch 2 are transferred to OKYROE.

The dead bodies are passed to Frontex asset Siem Pilot.

Image 1: Libyan coastguard patrol vessel, migrant rubber boat, and SEA-WATCH 2 RHIB 1.

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Image 2: Screenshot of the evolution of SEA-WATCH 2 positions throughout the night of the 20th till 21th of October 2016.

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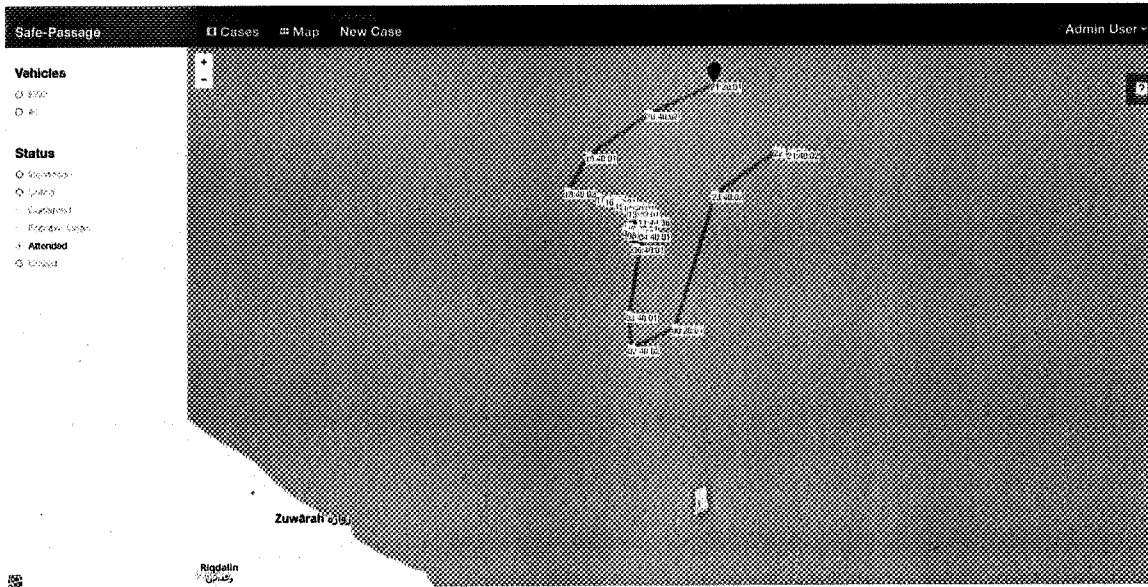info@sea-watch.org
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1.	33.0920070	12.4465930	2016-10-21 00:20:01	
2.	33.0920070	12.4465930	2016-10-21 00:40:01	
3.	33.0920070	12.4465930	2016-10-21 01:20:06	
4.	33.0920070	12.4465930	2016-10-21 01:40:02	
5.	33.0920070	12.4465930	2016-10-21 02:20:01	
6.	33.0749530	12.4031830	2016-10-21 02:40:02	
7.	33.0749530	12.4031830	2016-10-21 03:20:02	
8.	33.1027880	12.4008980	2016-10-21 03:40:01	
9.	33.1027880	12.4008980	2016-10-21 04:20:02	
10.	33.1716430	12.4137070	2016-10-21 04:40:01	
11.	33.1716430	12.4137070	2016-10-21 05:20:02	
12.	33.1844470	12.4115550	2016-10-21 05:40:02	
13.	33.1844470	12.4115550	2016-10-21 06:20:01	
14.	33.1606420	12.4076300	2016-10-21 06:40:01	
15.	33.1606420	12.4076300	2016-10-21 07:20:02	
16.	33.1606420	12.4076300	2016-10-21 07:40:01	
17.	33.1606420	12.4076300	2016-10-21 08:20:02	
18.	33.1727520	12.4024080	2016-10-21 08:40:02	
19.	33.1727520	12.4024080	2016-10-21 09:20:02	
20.	33.1751130	12.3972680	2016-10-21 09:40:01	
21.	33.1782930	12.4014750	2016-10-21 10:20:01	
22.	33.1782930	12.4014750	2016-10-21 10:40:01	
23.	33.1832750	12.4130200	2016-10-21 11:40:36	
24.	33.1832750	12.4130200	2016-10-21 12:20:01	

Image 3: Position of SEA-WATCH 2 during the Libyan Coastguard incident in decimals, time GMT.

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SW2 21.10 0317//33° 4' N12°24'E from RADAR

Position of boat in distress // 33°03N12°25E

most southern point //33°3'N12°24'E

204° 2.63 sm
Route: 2.63 sm

12 NM ZONE

Wegpunkt-Eigenschaften □ ✕

Basis   Beschreibung Erweitert

Eigenschaften

Name | Position of boat in distress // 33°03N12°25E

Zeige diese Karte ☑

Symbol | MOB ⌄

Breitengrad | 33 03.8557 N

Längengrad | 012 25.2970 E

Ankunftradius | 0.050

Bereichsradien anzeigen ☐

Beschreibung

Verknüpfungen ⌄

OK   Abbrechen

SW2 21.10 0317//33° 4' N12°24'E from RADAR

Position of boat in distress // 33°03N12°25E
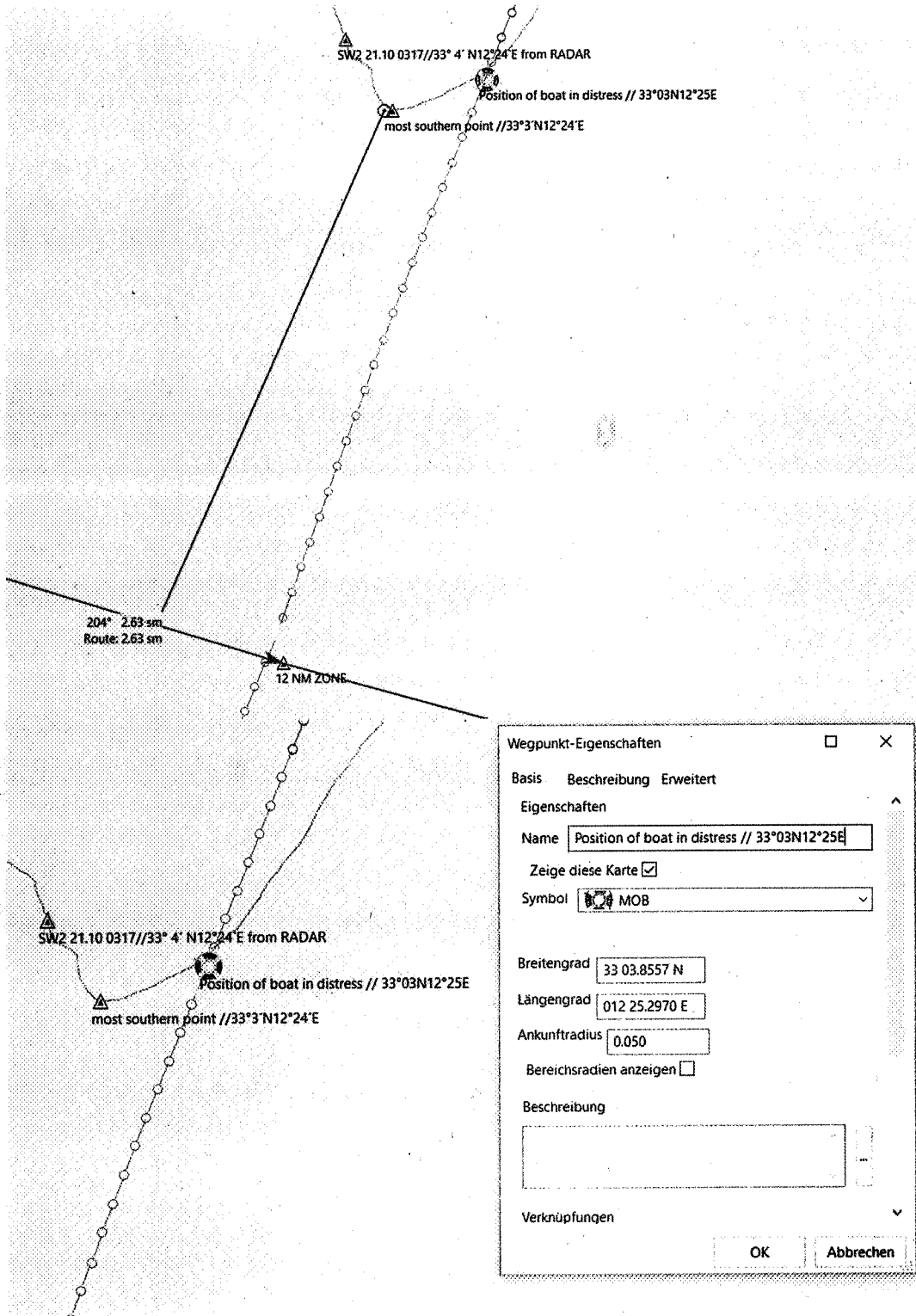
most southern point //33°3'N12°24'E

Image 4-5: Screenshot of the position of the boat in distress once SEA-WATCH 2 reached the position and distance from Libyan TTW.