Beat: Miscellaneous

6 dead, 10 missing after boat carrying migrants capsizes off Mayotte

-, 10.10.2012, 15:58 Time

USPA News - A small boat carrying migrants capsized in the Indian Ocean off the French overseas territory of Mayotte on early Monday morning, killing at least six people and leaving ten others missing, the United Nations (UN) refugee agency said on Tuesday. The accident happened in the early hours of Monday when the small vessel carrying 24 people capsized about 300 meters (984 feet) from the coast of Mayotte, which is an archipelago located in the northern Mozambique Channel between northwestern Madagascar and northeastern Mozambique.

Adrian Edwards, a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said six people are confirmed to have drowned while ten others remain missing and are feared to have died as well. It brings to 69 the number of people reported dead or missing in similar incidents near Mayotte so far this year. "The capsizing is a reminder of the risks faced by people desperate to escape poverty, conflict and persecution," he said during a press conference in Geneva. "As in the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Aden, the seas around Mayotte are the scene of irregular movements of migrants and refugees searching for a better life or protection from persecution and war." The migrants in Monday`s accident had left the island of Anjouan, part of the Union of Comoros, and were heading to Mayotte. Migrants and refugees often use small open vessels known as "kwassa-kwassa" to sail from the Comoros to the more prosperous French territory of Mayotte. "Most of these movements take place without the requisite documentation and involve considerable risk to those attempting them," Edwards said. "Asylum seekers account for a small proportion of these movements but their numbers have been increasing in the last two years." According to UNHCR, around 1,200 people applied for asylum in Mayotte last year, an increase of 41 percent from 2010. About 90 percent of applicants came from the Comoros while citizens from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Rwanda and Burundi accounted for the rest.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-49/6-dead-10-missing-after-boat-carrying-migrants-capsizes-off-mayotte.html

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619