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**\*\*\*Photo available at:**

[http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related\\_material/2012\\_NATO\\_Forensic\\_Oceanography\\_Map\\_of\\_the\\_Boat's\\_Drift\\_Trajectory.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/2012_NATO_Forensic_Oceanography_Map_of_the_Boat's_Drift_Trajectory.pdf)

## **NATO: Clarify Response to Deaths at Sea**

*On Anniversary of Migrant Deaths, Public Disclosure Needed*

(Brussels, March 26, 2012) – NATO and its member states should provide information to help clarify the chain of events that led to the death of 63 boat migrants in the Mediterranean a year ago, a coalition of human rights groups said in joint letters to NATO and member states released today.

Letters requesting information were sent on March 26, 2012, to [NATO's Maritime Command](#) in Naples, Italy, as well as to the defense ministers of [France](#), [Great Britain](#), [Italy](#), [Spain](#), the [United States](#), and [Canada](#).

“The shocking loss of life in the Mediterranean in 2011 – the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that at least 1500 people died attempting the crossing last year – demands concerted efforts to investigate as well as to prevent such tragedies in the future,” the signatories urge in the letters.

The signatories are Human Rights Watch, the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), the Euro-African network Migreurop, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the coalition Boats 4 People, and the French organization Gisti. Member organizations of FIDH, Migreurop, and EMHRN signed the letters to France, Italy, Spain, and Canada.

The letters seek clarification of what presence and capacity NATO and its member states had in the maritime area when the tragic episode took place. The incident involved a disabled boat filled with migrants fleeing Libya which was left to drift for two weeks in the Mediterranean before finally landing back in Libya on April 10, 2011. The boat ran into trouble not long after its departure from Tripoli on the night between March 26 and March 27, 2011. Despite distress calls and sightings by survivors of a military helicopter and a warship, the boat received no help, leading to the deaths of 63 out of the 72 passengers of the boat, including 20 women and two babies.

NATO and France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, the United States, and Canada all had warships patrolling NATO's Maritime Surveillance Area, to enforce the arms embargo on Libya, as of March 24, 2011, two days before the migrant boat left Tripoli. The letters ask them to provide detailed information about the patrol sectors of each ship and their response to two different distress alerts about the drifting boat.

In July 2011, Human Rights Watch sent letters to NATO and the defense ministers of France, Italy, Malta and the United States inquiring about the incident. To date no response has been received.

The Migration Committee of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) is expected to make public on March 29, 2012, the findings of its inquiry into the tragedy and wider phenomenon of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean sea.

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**The full list of organizations who signed the letters:**

Human Rights Watch

International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)

Migreurop

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)

Gisti

Boats 4 People

Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (France)

Italian Council for Refugees (Italy)

Unione forense per la tutela dei diritti umani (Italy)

Ligues des droits et des libertés (Canada)

Acsur-Las Segovias (Spain)