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UNHCR thanks Danish ship for rescuing asylum seekers stranded at sea

LONDON, June 9 – Last Tuesday (May 31), *M.V. Clementine Maersk*, a Danish-registered container ship, rescued 27 persons adrift in the rolling waves of the Mediterranean. The captain of the *Clementine Maersk* diverted his vessel from its scheduled course – despite the risk of delays and financial losses – in order to rescue the desperate boat people. Those on board the stranded boat were mainly Somalis, but included two Tunisians and one Palestinian.

"We are very grateful that the captain followed international maritime law and custom, as well as his moral instincts, and rescued the group from their boat," said Pirkko Kourula, Director of UNHCR's Europe Bureau. "But we are also disturbed to hear that other ships apparently ignored them and left them to what might have been a disastrous fate."

The *Clementine Maersk*, a three-year-old 347-metre-long vessel based in Hirtshals, Denmark, reached its first scheduled port of call at Felixstowe in the United Kingdom on Saturday afternoon (June 4). Twenty-six of the rescued individuals, including two teenagers, sought asylum. One Tunisian man asked to be returned to his homeland and remained on board the ship.

It is extremely rare for persons to be rescued at sea and brought to the UK. The UK authorities speedily completed initial asylum interviews on board, while the cargo was off-loaded, and then let the asylum seekers disembark.

Every year, an unknown number of people die trying to enter Europe, many of them while crossing the Mediterranean. A coalition of European non-governmental organisations has documented close to 5,000 confirmed deaths over the past decade, the majority of them at sea. However, the real figure may well be much higher.

For more detailed information, please visit:

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