

Churches mourn loss of life on Mediterranean, call for preventative action

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[Joint release with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe and the Conference of European Churches]

Together the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) grieve the drowning of hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean. As many as 700 people are feared dead following the capsizing of their vessel just outside Libyan waters. Rescue efforts are underway and so far 28 survivors have been found, according to media reports.

“We remember in prayer those who have died and express our deepest sympathies to their families.” “We deplore this loss of life,” remarked the CEC general secretary Rev. Dr Guy Liagre, “and are deeply saddened by this tragedy on Europe’s doorstep.”

“We pray also for those involved in the demanding rescue and recovery mission,” he said.

“This catastrophe reminds us of near daily instances across the Mediterranean in which Italian, Maltese, and Greek coast guards are largely left alone in rescue efforts. Reacting to this latest tragedy, and following so many others,” the WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit called for “renewed solidarity and action, and for a resumption and strengthening of a collective European response.”

“We ask for meaningful European search and rescue efforts and call on European Union Member States to contribute substantially and speedily to such efforts in order to prevent future loss of life among people driven to this desperate crossing,” Tveit said.

Tveit added, “These tragedies are strong calls for strengthening the efforts to address the root causes for poverty, social insecurity and conflicts in the countries from where the migrants are coming.

“Only legal and safe pathways into Europe would help to prevent these tragedies from happening. This includes increased refugee resettlement and lifting of visa requirements for people arriving from countries in conflict, like Syria and Eritrea. We need safe passages,” said Doris Peschke, general secretary of the CCME.