



HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA ASSOCIATION
REFUGEE OBSERVATION REPORT

SEFERİHİSAR / İZMİR

DATE OF INCIDENT: 09 DECEMBER 2007

DATE OF REPORT: 11 DECEMBER 2007

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1. Abstract

The boat that was supposed to be transporting a group of asylum-seekers/refugees composed of 85 persons to Samos island of Greece having departed from Seferihisar county of İzmir province on a Saturday night in 08 December 2007 was overturned and sank due to adverse weather conditions¹. In the morning of the December 9th, in the operations of search and rescue on the corpses that reached the land, the corpses of 46 persons were detected. 6 persons, on the other hand, were rescued with their own efforts or with the help of coast guard and fishermen².

2. Committee

The committee, which was composed of the members of Human Rights Agenda Association, held negotiations in Seferihisar county of İzmir province in 11 December 2007 and carried out some inspections. Having held some talks with Seferihisar Chief Prosecutor and coast guard officials that continued the operations of search and rescue, the committee gathered information by contacting with the fishermen that participated in the first phase of the operations of rescue right after the incident and also the press that followed the incidents in the region.

3. Background

Each year many African and Asian people try to reach European Union member countries, such as Greece, Bulgaria and Italy via Aegean Sea and these voyages that are full of dangers end up with deaths very frequently. According to the information given in the press, in the accidents that took place in Aegean Sea only in the year of 2007, 82 persons died and 102 were lost¹. Taking into account that 20 persons died and 53 were lost in this region in 2006, this increase in numbers is frightening. Hundreds of thousands of people leave their homes and try to reach a safe country due to the conflicts in Africa, Asia and Middle East. Consequently, it is apparent that there is going to be an increase both in the numbers of people trying to reach EU member countries and also in the number of incidents that will take place accordingly in the forthcoming eras.

The asylum-seekers that try to reach Greece via Turkey prefer two main routes¹; Turkey-Greece land border and Aegean Sea.

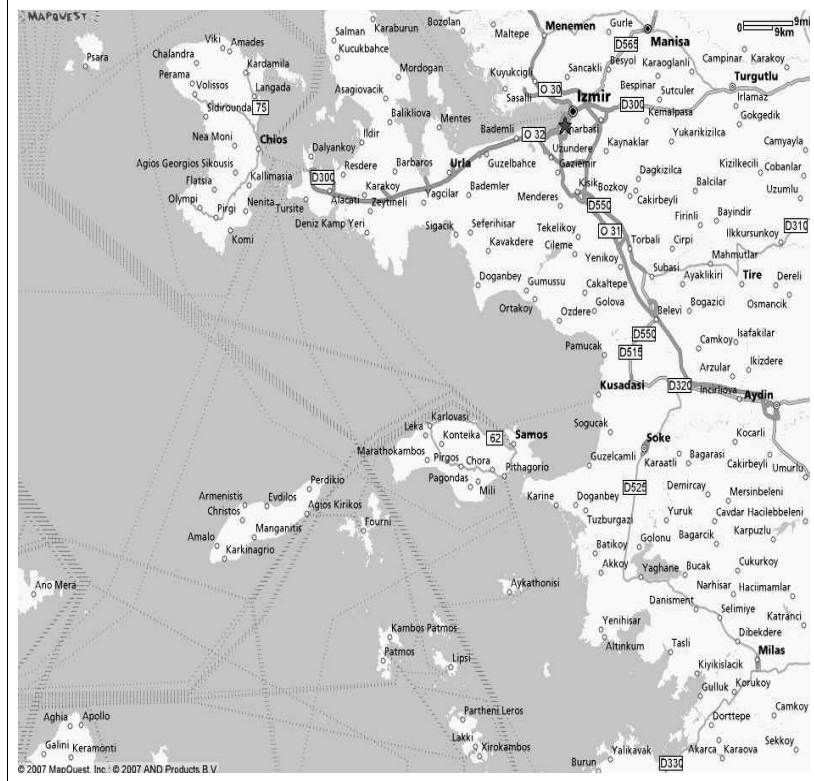
İzmir and its coastline is only a few nautical miles away from the Greek islands in Aegean Sea. The Asylum-seekers and refugees that try to reach Greece via sea through Turkey especially in winter months use the routes that start from Kuşadası, Seferihisar, Çeşme and Karaburun coasts and that aim at Greek islands that are at a distance of 1-2 hours. The county of Seferihisar, where the accident took place, is 15 nautical miles away from the Samos island of Greece that the asylum-seekers tried to reach. Adverse weather conditions that help the refugees hide from security forces also cause these voyages to end up with a disaster at the same time.

4. Negotiations

4.1. Chief Public Prosecutor

Having stated that the number of corpses that were detected on the first day was 42 and the number of those detected on the second day was 4 in the rescue operations that were started after the incident, Chief Public Prosecutor Mehmet Şahin reported that 6 persons were rescued alive, three of these were being treated in Yeşilyurt Atatürk Training Hospital and thus in total 52 persons were found and no identity card could be found on any of the corpses.

The Chief Prosecutor also pointed out that two of the corpses were female, others were male, one of the females was 15-16 years of age and the other was 20-25 years of age, and that the ages of males ranged between 20 – 40 and that the young men were dominant.



It was also reported that the corpses were sent to Morgue of İzmir Forensic Medicine and that they shall be buried in the cemetery of the homeless by the Municipality after the legal procedures related to authentication and holding are completed.

The Chief Prosecutor stated that most of the captured persons related that they were Palestinian, however that this would be told for the purposes of asylum most of the time and in reality they are African. The same information was also provided by the Coast Guard officials and fishermen that took part in rescue operations.

It was stated that the search and rescue operations, at the first phases of which fishermen boats were also included, was going to be continued for 72 hours (until the morning of 12 December 2007) by means of coast guard, civil defense teams and boats of these teams and also by a helicopter.

The Chief Prosecutor said that this kind of incidents had been encountered before as well, however this was the first time that they had seen such a huge disaster. It was also emphasized that some of the asylum-seekers that were captured in previous incidents and controls had the residence certificates given from Kuşadası, Aydın and Hatay.

The Chief Prosecutor had suggested that the UN should its part and that refugee accommodation centers should be founded in these regions and also that UN should allocate pecuniary resources for repatriation mechanism for the solution of the problem in the short run, and that rich countries should help poor countries basically and that the solution shall be

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found when the living standards of people living in those countries are improved in the long run.

4.2. Civil defense officials and fishermen:

The fisherman E.K., who participated in rescue operations upon the call of coast guard, stated that he gathered 28 corpses from the sea around 08:00 a.m., and that he found these corpses in sandy beaches and that many other corpses were found in rocky coasts together with the coast guard teams and six persons were rescued alive.

He also stated that the corpses were collected within an area of 3 km between Seferihisar Akkum location and Killik Burnu and that the corpses of 17 persons were found 200 m offshore.



Committee members ; Selvet Çetin, Orçun Ulusoy, Nalan Erkem, Pürül Erçoban

He pointed out that there were life jackets on all of the corpses and one of these had the name “Haluk” on it and another one featured a Greek name and that there were car tubes on some of the corpses which are used as life jackets.

The fisherman E.K. said that they didn’t observe traces of strike on the corpses found in the sandy region at the first glance and that the deaths seemed to be caused by drowning, **however** that some parts of the bodies of the corpses that were found in rocky areas were found to be broken into pieces due to striking on the rocks.

Stating that the weather was stormy in the night of the incident, fisherman E.K. and other fishermen put forward that wave height exceeded 5-6 meters at times and that they suppose that the corpses were broken into pieces for this reason. The fishermen also said that the surviving persons could be the ones that the waves dragged towards the beaches not to the rocks.

The fishermen also witnessed that 46 corpses were collected from the sea, and that two of these were females, one at the age of 15-16, and the other one around 20-25 and they claimed that the corpses could belong to African people around the ages of 20 - 25 with dark skins except for two.

The fishermen said that the surviving individuals told them that the boat was around 12-15 meters long and contained 75-85 persons and that they struggled with the waves in the sea for 10 hours after the boat sank.

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Both the fishermen and coast guard officials stated that this kind of incidents are encountered especially in the months of winter and that wavy weathers are preferred since the small boats are not captured by coast guard radars.

The fishermen reported that the boats carrying the asylum-seekers preferred Kuşadası Güzelçamlı town, Çeşme, Alaçatı, Seferihisar Doğanbeyli Bay and Karaburun coasts.

The fishermen also pointed out that in Seferihisar four major asylum-seeker/refugee groups were captured within the last year and that these incidents found a place in the press however smaller groups are also captured frequently and that the Gendarme forces carry out inspections on the roads leading up to the county.

The fisherman named E.D. stated that he saw people in sea around 21.00 p.m. – 02.00 a.m. near Killik Burnu with his own boat and that he immediately informed Coast Guard authorities and that he saved 10 persons alive while, on the other hand they found the corpses of 6 individuals.

The fishermen also stated that in the month of January in 2007 they saw the boat named “Gülistan” that was about to sink and that they rescued all of the persons aboard and that there were 87 persons in 12 meters long boat, two of which were the crew, and that they learnt that the majority of the asylum-seekers were from Somali.

Another interviewed fisherman said that they rescued 10 persons offshore in Çeşme and that they found 3 corpses and all of these were delivered to Coast Guard officials.

Fishermen stated that a boat sank offshore Urla county Zeytineli village that departed from Sığacık approximately one month ago and that 16 corpses were found in the sea¹.

A coast guard official emphasized that some of the refugees that were captured in previous incidents were well educated and that especially Kunama people are educated and speak English very well.

Another coast guard official stated that even though some of the refugees are captured they try to flee again. The official stated that a female asylum-seeker was captured while trying to reach Greece in three different incidents.

Following suggestions were brought forward for solution; increasing the frequency of controls both on land and in sea, reinforcing the technical equipments of Coast Guard teams, ensuring that UN does its part, providing accommodation to these individuals, increasing the border controls and helping the poor countries for a permanent solution.

5. Suggestions

Suggestions

- The authorities should immediately take any legal and judicial precaution in order to prevent international human trafficking in Aegean Sea.
- The government should immediately pass the Law on Asylum that has been promised within the frame of National Action Plan and render the legislation on refugees compliant with the international standards and define the asylum right as a constitutional right.

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- Turkey should eliminate the judiciary and physical obstacles in front of reaching the asylum procedure and guarantee the basic rights of the people in accordance with the international standards.
- Local and national authorities should carry out necessary arrangements in order to meet certain humanitarian needs of asylum-seekers and refugees, especially health, food and accommodation, and to provide for the safety of their lives.
- European Union and United Nations have to do their parts on the subject of asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants.