

*Letter to the UNHCR Spokesperson, Mr Adrian Edwards*

Dear Mr. Adrian Edwards,

The Eritrean Community residing in Italy writes to express dismay and concern about your statement confirming the death of about 350 Eritreans in the latest boat tragedy in the Mediterranean off the Libyan coast.

The community of Eritreans in Italy, which express its sorrow for all the victims without distinction of origin, understandably lives hours of anguish and share the same hopes of the families back home that pray your statements on the number of Eritrean victims are incorrect, that the survivors interviewed by you are mistaken about the identity of our fellow compatriots. No Eritrean would like that the news spread by you were to be true, we wish the information provided to be wrong and that's why we ask, hoping for a prompt response, how can UNHCR know the exact number of Eritreans when it still does not know the exact number of victims? (Since the total number has been estimated from 700 to 900 approximately). How can we only know that the Eritreans were 350 when the origin of the other victims from Syria, Somalia, Chad, Sierra Leone, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Gambia, Ivory Coast and Ethiopia remains unknown? How can the only certain figure, beside the apparent one of the 28 survivors, be for the number of Eritrean victims already estimated to be 350? And if, as you stated, the number of Eritreans was made clear by the survivors, how many Eritrean survivors have been able to correctly identify 350 of their fellow citizens? Has UNHCR obtained their documents? Or has it adopted any other method to prove their nationality?

The Community of Eritreans in Italy is living hours of anguish, understandably it hopes that the figure of the 350 Eritrean victims of the latest tragedy, as stated by UNHCR, are proven to be un substantiated and that this number is not being exploited for political ends.

We look forward to a prompt and clarifying reply.

Best Regards,

Media Committee Italy

Spokesperson of the Community of Eritreans in Italy