

WRITTEN QUESTION P-5805/06
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to the Commission

Subject: Refugee crisis at the borders of Fortress Europe

Since spring 2005 there has been a steady stream of reports about refugees who have died trying to reach Europe by sea. The media and NGOs put the figure at up to 20 000 in recent years. However, extensive research has failed to produce any reliable information as to the actual numbers. Since 1993, UNITED for Intercultural Action has counted 7182 deaths of refugees 'at the walls of Fortress Europe'¹. In backing up the figure of 20 000 deaths quoted by the ICRC and the UNHCR, the Red Cross points out that some 90% of the 7200 proven deaths occurred at sea, and that in general in such cases only every third body is found.

- What efforts has the Commission made thus far to determine the number of refugees who have died at the Union's maritime borders?

- What information does the Commission have about this problem?

- Is the Commission aware that the introduction of international border patrols off Gibraltar and between West Africa and the Canary Islands has merely led to refugees and immigrants starting their journeys from as far away as Senegal, thereby dramatically increasing the number of deaths?

- How can the Commission justify the fact that its cooperation arrangements with African States are serving to prevent refugees covered by the Geneva Convention from fleeing their countries?

- Why, when boats are stopped at sea, are no checks carried out to determine whether the occupants are immigrants or refugees?

- What measures does the Commission plan to take, or propose to the Member States, in order to bring an end to this intolerable humanitarian disaster?

¹ <http://www.united.non-profit.nl/pdfs/listofdeaths.pdf>