

## **Smuggling People to Yemen by Sea Routes on Rise: UNHCR**

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UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Tuesday the deadly traffic in the Gulf of Aden continues unabated, with 132 people dying last weekend and a total of 157 people dead or missing during the first 19 days of 2008.

UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler added that a total of 2,452 boat people were recorded arriving in Yemen during the same period. Most of them were from Somalia.

"On the 18th of January, a boat carrying 135 passengers approached the coast of Yemen. Seeing lights ashore and fearing capture by the Yemeni Coast Guard, the smugglers ordered passengers to jump overboard. Those who resisted were beaten with sticks and stabbed. A large wave then capsized the boat, causing the death of 114 passengers and two smugglers," he said.

Spindler further explained that on 19 January 10 women and six children -- part of a group of 29 Somalis aboard a two-engine smuggling boat -- drowned when strong winds capsized the boat beside the coast of Yemen.

They had left Somalia four days earlier and encountered engine problems. The 13 male survivors told us that four children had died under their parents' eyes from lack of food, water and exposure. The other two drowned.

The three smugglers allegedly ran away and have so far not been found.

In recent weeks, two smuggling boats have been intercepted by the Yemeni Coastguard. Patrols and crack-downs have increased in an attempt to deter the smugglers and save lives. Some boats used by the smugglers had been given to Somali fishermen by international aid agencies after the Tsunami disaster in 2005.

The new arrivals said they paid USD 150 for their trip to Yemen.

They stated they had left Somalia due to violence in the Mogadishu region, the continuing hostilities between government forces and insurgents.

The survivors said an increasing number of civilians are killed by heavy artillery.

According to the refugee agency in 2007 alone, more than 29,500 people arrived on the shores of Yemen while over 1,400 people died or remained missing -- presumed dead -- while making the hazardous journey.