

---

## Call for the Development of Humanitarian Standards of Response to Migrant Victims of Violence and Trauma Crossing Borders

Submitted to the International Organization for Migration  
at the Ninety-fourth Session of the IOM Council 29 November 2007  
by John K. Bingham, ICMC Head of Policy

*Mr Chair:* The International Catholic Migration Commission would like to commend the new December issue of your magazine *MIGRATION*, on the tables in the back. As usual, there is an excellent set of articles, one in particular on p. 20 entitled. *Smugglers Prey on Migrants Fleeing the Horn of Africa*. Bravo.

Your article is right. Off the Horn of Africa alone, 64 Somalis drowned last Friday: 49 bodies fished out of the water by fisherman, 15 bodies washed up on the coast; 3 of them children. This month opened with 40 migrants drowning one day after being pushed overboard; 66 drowned that same way in one day as last month closed.

UNHCR reports that out of 20,000 people making that crossing this year, about 1 in 20—5%!—have died or disappeared. That's nearly 1,000 people-- just *reported*, just this year, and just in the Gulf of Aden. It's also "just" deaths and disappearances in that crossing: *what about the survivors??*

Our members and partners tell us that this agony occurs daily, in crossings either to the Greek islands, to Malta and Italy, to the Canary Islands, in the Caribbean and on land borders, including in particular those in North and Central America. The Portuguese Presidency of the European Union was exactly right in its statement here yesterday when it noted *"the tragic images we see every day in the media..."*

Your article reports that *"a network of international and local NGOs are monitoring the migrants' routes, the risks that they face, and finding ways to protect them."* That is generally correct, but vastly overstated. This obviously is not a job for NGOs alone. Surely a better humanitarian response to boat people and other migrants injured and traumatized crossing borders can bring us all together. To again borrow language from the Portuguese Presidency, *"Let us join efforts and work fast!"*

What is needed is a commitment and a standard of regular, better-resourced and *universal* humanitarian response. At the heart is not only a sense of emergency in these situations, but a recognition that many of these migrants are victims—victims of violence and trauma: men, women and children beaten, shot, stabbed, drugged, raped; starved or thirsted to death or near death; asphyxiated, thrown overboard—or eyewitnesses to such horror.

We have taken this issue up with UNHCR, and it is among those being considered in the High Commissioner's Dialogue that will take place in this building two weeks from today. We have also taken it up with OHCHR, the Red Cross and the Council of Europe, all of whom have embraced it for urgent attention, noting, like us, how important it is for IOM to be involved.

At yesterday's session, the Director General referred to an *"accumulation of ad hoc requests"* that in another context has motivated IOM to act with deliberate focus. So here is our question—and hope—for IOM: especially given your work in Lampedusa, and IOM's increasing commitment to migrant rights and humanitarian imperatives in migration, will IOM work with the UN and Red Cross systems and NGOs on the development of international standards for humanitarian services for these migrant victims?

*Thank you.*