

Greek Coast Guard Drowns Entire Syrian Family

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Mohammed Burgess of Latakia, Syria is the sole survivor of the deliberate murder of his entire family by the [Greek Coast Guard on Tuesday, September 13](#). Burgess and his wife and two children boarded a migrant ship in Lebanon and were headed toward Italy when the ship began having problems and finally ran out of diesel fuel. As they were drifting on the Mediterranean Sea, the Greek Coast Guard approached the ship, came alongside, and tied their ship to the Greek ship. The Greek sailors ordered the passengers to disembark and board the Greek ship. After coming on board, the Greek sailors took all the passengers’ cell phones, money, gold jewelry the women were wearing, and luggage. They also beat several of the men without cause.

The Greek ship then began sailing for about five hours, but Burgess did not know the exact direction they were headed because the Greeks refused to have any communication with the passengers. During the five hours, no water was offered to any passenger, including children.

When they finally stopped sailing, the Greek soldiers began taking out and blowing up small plastic dinghies, the type used by vacationers, not military grade. They threw the dinghies into the sea and then pushed four to five passengers into the sea after each dinghy. The passengers were to climb into the dinghy from the sea after leaving everything they had with the Greeks.

Burgess was on the last dinghy, and as he jumped off the Greek ship they accelerated at high speed, which immediately sent up a huge wave in the wake of the Coast Guard vessel, which engulfed the last dinghy which held all of Burgess’ family.

As he jumped toward his family, he saw his wife, their two small children, his wife’s sister, her child, Burgess’ cousin, his wife, and their child floundering in the dinghy as the air valve was not shut properly by the Greeks, and in moments the dinghy was deflating and his family was in the sea.

Burgess began a frantic struggle in the sea trying to hold up his son, while his wife's heroic actions were to try to keep their other child above water. In her desperate attempt to get her child above the waves, her head was pushed under water and she began to drown. Once she was lost to the sea, her child was helpless and disappeared beneath the waves. Burgess was torn between trying to keep his son alive or trying to turn toward diving beneath the waves to try and rescue his wife or child. He was in an impossible position of not being able to do anything other than concentrate on survival.

He remained swimming until the next morning, but in the night very high waves pulled his son away from him. Burgess had then lost his entire family because of the deliberate and planned actions of the Greek Coast Guard. The Turkish Coast Guard rescued him from the sea later in the morning, and they also retrieved bodies from the sea. The Italian Coast Guard also retrieved some bodies from the sea.

Burgess gave his eyewitness testimony in a video interview to online media. Further details were given by the mother-in-law of Burgess, who had lost two of her daughters and three grandchildren in the tragedy. In other YouTube videos dating from 2020 and 2021, the Greek Coast Guard is [documented leaving migrants adrift](#) in the sea without help, and also one video shows the Greek sailors [beating the migrants and shooting at them](#).

The Greek Coast Guard has a long history of human rights abuses and breaking international maritime laws. On July 7, [the European Court of Human Rights](#) issued a ruling against Greece's illegal and deadly practice of pushing back boats of asylum seekers.

Eleven women and children, including infants, died off the Greek island of Farmakonisi on January 20, 2014, in what survivors describe as a pushback operation after the Greek Coast Guard was towing their boat, which resulted in death.

At least 32 more cases of alleged pushbacks by Greece are pending before the Court, and the charges include violating the right to life of the applicants and their relatives and subjecting survivors to degrading treatment when they strip-searched them in public.

Human Rights Watch and other groups have repeatedly documented how the Greek Coast Guard has abandoned migrants at sea by violently transferring individuals from Greek islands, or from the dinghy upon which they were traveling, to motor-less inflatable rafts, and leaving them adrift near Turkish territorial waters. They have also intercepted and disabled boats carrying migrants by damaging or removing the engines or fuel and towing them back to Turkey, or puncturing inflatable boats.

The Turkish Defense Minister stated on July 17, that the Greek Coast Guard is confirmed to have pushed two dinghies with migrants to Turkish waters on the western side of the Aegean Sea.

"One of our drones has recorded LS-930, a Greek Coast Guard vessel, pushing back irregular migrants' boats to Turkish waters," it said.

The migrants were saved by the Turkish Coast Guard responding to the information sent back by the drones. The ministry stressed that the practice of pushing migrants in dinghies was a violation of territorial waters.

The report ["Pushbacks and Drowning Human Rights in the Aegean Sea,"](#) exposes the violation of international immigration law by Greece, documenting that Greek forces pushed

back a total of 41,523 asylum seekers between 2020 and May 31, 2022, according to Turkey's Ombudsman Institution.

"Some 98 percent of the pushbacks involved torture and ill-treatment, and 88 percent of the 8,000 asylum seekers who came to the Greek border were beaten," the report said.

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