

# Europe: 'Dark day': migrant rescue ship Aquarius ends operations

Monday 10 December 2018, by [Reuters](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2018).

## **Médecins Sans Frontières says 'smear campaign' by European governments hampered work in Mediterranean**

Search and rescue ship Aquarius, which has saved tens of thousands of migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean, has ended its operations, said Médecins Sans Frontières, the charity that runs the ship.

MSF and its partner SOS Mediterranée said they were forced to terminate its operations due to a "smear campaign" by European governments.

The ship has been blocked at the French port of Marseilles since it lost its [Panamanian registration at the end of September](#).

The Aquarius was the last charity rescue ship operating off of Libya. Last year there were five groups running rescue ships.

"This is a dark day. Not only has [Europe](#) failed to provide dedicated search and rescue capacity, it has also actively sabotaged others' attempts to save lives," Vickie Hawkins, head of MSF UK, said in a statement.

"The end of Aquarius means more lives lost at sea; more avoidable deaths that will go unwitnessed and unrecorded. It really is a case of 'out of sight out of mind' for UK and European leaders as men, women and children perish," she said.

Nearly 5,000 migrants died in 2016 while trying to cross the Mediterranean from Africa and the Middle East, fleeing war and poverty, according to the UN agency International Organization for [Migration](#) (IOM).

The number of migrants reaching Italy has fallen sharply since last year as smuggling networks inside Libya, a key departure point for mainly sub-Saharan Africans, have been disrupted and the European Union has stepped up efforts to increase Libyan coastguard patrols.

Data by IOM showed that more than 2,000 people have drowned so far this year.

Italian magistrates in November accused MSF of illegally dumping toxic waste at ports in [southern Italy and ordered Aquarius to be impounded](#).

The charity denied any wrongdoing and accused Italy of seeking to criminalise humanitarian search-and-rescue missions.

The public prosecutor's office in Catania, Sicily, said it believed crew on the Aquarius, and its sister ship VOS Prudence, had illegally dumped potentially dangerous medical waste among ordinary rubbish between January 2017 and May 2018.

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## **Reuters**

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## **P.S.**

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