

Three boatloads of migrants recovered

Luqa, Malta, June 15, 2008. Earlier this morning, the Armed Forces of Malta's Operations' Centre at Luqa Barracks was informed by a tuna-pen cage operator that one of their firm's vessels, the F/V Gambero, which was in a position some 55 nautical miles (NM) from Malta, had a boatload of illegal migrants alongside the tuna-pen cage in tow.

The Mare Blue's owner, Mr. Giovanni Ciappara, reported that some 28 migrants were onboard this small boat (including 5 women), and that they required assistance. The migrants, all Somali, were claiming that their group had originally been of 34, and that six of thier party were missing.

By 11.38hrs, an AFM Air Wing Islander aircraft was scrambled to the area and verified the initial report. Subsequently, at 13.05hrs the AFM Maritime Squadron's P-52 Protector-class patrol vessel was dispatched to the area to render assistance as required. A mid-sea transfer was effected between 15.45 and 16.51 hrs.

At. 15.30 hrs, fishing-vessel "Nuovo Lorenzo" notified the AFM's Operations' Centre that it had also spotted a boatload of illegal migrants in a position 30 NM south of Malta. The migrants were intercepted by the Bremse-class inshore patrol boat P-32 at 18.30hrs, after having been refilled enroute by P-52. These migrants are expected to be landed in Malta at 03.00hrs circa.

At 18.55hrs, an AFM Air Wing Alouette helicopter conducting a routine aerial patrol around the Maltese coast sighted a boatload of migrants in a position some 27 NM south of Malta. As P-52 was enroute with its first boatload of migrants, it was diverted to intercept this second sighted boatload of migrants. They were safely taken onboard at 21.15hrs, and are expected to make port at Haywharf Base at 01.00hrs approximately.

Thanks to Major Ivan CONSIGLIO.