



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Film Screening

Lifeboat

Tuesday, November 27, 2018

5:30 - 7:00 PM

2200 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good evening, and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's film screening of the award-winning documentary, Lifeboat.

Lifeboat captures the desperate plight of refugees as they undertake the dangerous Mediterranean crossing from Libya to Europe in rubber boats. The film follows volunteers from a German non-profit who work to bring humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering and restore the human dignity of those fleeing war, human trafficking, slavery and other dire human rights abuses in Libya and the surrounding region in Africa.

To this day, Libya continues to be a major transit point for those fleeing conflict and poverty elsewhere in Africa. Just this past Saturday, 113 people were rescued off the coast of the country by Libya's coastguard. In addition, it has been well-documented that these migrants often find themselves at the mercy of smugglers and traffickers who exploit them and at times sell them into a violent system of forced labor and modern-day slavery.

Over the past several years the Commission has sought to address the global refugee crisis in several ways. We have held hearings and briefings on the root causes of forced migration such as war, government repression, slavery, religious discrimination and the violent suppression of basic human rights in places like Sudan, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and Eritrea. We have urged President Trump to raise the current refugee cap in the United States, so we can better live up to our belief that this country should be a haven for the most vulnerable and oppressed groups of people around the world. We have also sought to educate Congress and the public through the use of art and film.

Film can be a powerful tool for capturing both the suffering and resilience of those facing severe human rights abuses and remind us of our responsibility to work together in solidarity to stop these things from happening. I am grateful for the way Director Skye Fitzgerald has sought to harness this artform to draw attention to those who are struggling to obtain their most basic, fundamental freedoms. Lifeboat is not a feel-good film, but it is vitally important.

Skye, thank you for flying all the way out from the west coast to be here with us tonight. I would also like to thank UNHCR's Tessa Valk Mayerick, and CRS specialist Rhodie Margesson for joining us tonight.

Following the film screening, we are going to have a great panel discussion about the making of the film and how the international community can better respond to the crisis facing people along the Libyan coast. Thank you, and please enjoy the film.

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