



*Garante Nazionale  
dei diritti delle persone detenute o private della libertà personale*

**Press release**

**The National Guarantor climbs aboard the quarantine ship “Rhapsody” at anchor in Palermo**

Rome, 17 September 2020 - This morning Mauro Palma, president of the National Guarantor for the Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty (NG) and Daniela de Robert, member of the NG Board, after a meeting in Palermo Prefecture, climbed aboard the ship “Rhapsody”, together with the Head of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, Prefect Michele Di Bari. On board the ship, 868 migrant persons are currently placed under quarantine. They have been all previously held in the hotspot of Lampedusa. Of these, 54 are asymptomatic COVID-19 cases and accommodated in the ship’s cabins of a dedicated deck separated from the others. The remaining 814 are into 14-day preventive isolation. The ship has a total capacity of over 2,000 passengers and thus it allows the distancing requested.

The visit has been carried out in close cooperation with the Home Secretary, the staff from the Harbour Master's Office — who accompanied the delegation alongside the ship on a 'pilot boat' (one and a half miles from the port), and the USMAF (Maritime Air and Borders Healthcare Services), which provided the group of visitors with adequate PPE and the infection control of all the group components at arrival and before leaving the ship. The Red Cross — which is in charge of the health protection on board, as well as of the cultural mediation and information services, including those relating to the international protection procedures available to people aboard the ship — performed rapid swab tests to the delegation at boarding.

On the vessel, no police services are present, but only personnel from the Italian Red Cross and from the shipping company. Migrant persons are accommodated in double guest cabins (two single beds) or three-four guest cabins (double or even triple use in the case of a family). People are invited to limit their exits from the cabin to the only time necessary for some social activities, even in such a peculiar environment, while maintaining the social distancing needed. Meals are served in the cabin. Medical assistance is provided on board, except in rare cases of hospitalization for which the transfer by helicopter is required.

The delegation visited the cabins and the common spaces of one of the decks reserved for persons placed under preventive isolation (the same accommodation module is replicated for the other decks) and the delegation spent some time in conversation with some ship guests. The delegation also visited the access area reserved to migrants who tested positive, and could see how infection controls were performed at the staff shift in the same setting. In addition, the NG’s delegation had private talks with some people from different geographical areas, with the help of cultural mediators. The overall respectful appearance of the visited accommodations and the professionalism of the front line staff have nothing in common with the previous provisional accommodation in overcrowded hotspots. Moreover, it confirms the positive evaluation of the quarantine ship as an absolutely acceptable solution the National Guarantor has already made public in other occasions.

It is obvious that this evaluation is to be considered as such in these exceptional times. The effective possibility to be then offered to migrant persons to access, if the requirements are fulfilled, all the protection procedures is to be granted, as well as the support to inclusion foreseen in our domestic laws.

The National Guarantor expresses his thanks and appreciation for the efforts made by the Home Secretary Luciana Lamorgese and the Head of the Department Michele Di Bari and his staff to support the delegation in the visit.