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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

Following the skyrocketing of deaths in the Mediterranean, human rights and refugee aid organisations from across Europe call on European Commission to take decisive action.

Amidst harrowing reports of increased numbers of drownings due to European Governments' blocking of humanitarian assistance on Central Mediterranean, rights and aid groups from across Europe come together in a call for decisive action by the European Commission to halt the further loss of lives in the Mediterranean.

In an open letter to the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management, Mr. Christos Stylianides, the cross-European organisations call for decisive and immediate measures to stop the unacceptable drowning of hundreds of babies, children, women and men on Europe's doorstep.

This call to action follows on from a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) [report](#) which stated that more than 600 people attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean have drowned or are presumed drowned in the last four weeks due to the absence of NGO rescue boats active on the Central Mediterranean. These deaths represent approximately half of the total deaths in 2018 thus far.

While the European Union and its Member States, following the Summit on 28 June 2018, are seeking a long-term solution to migration and asylum, European civil society actors are demanding that the activities of search and rescue vessels cease to be obstructed, that they are released from their current docking positions, granted access to European ports, and that they are not subjected to fears of criminalisation and legal repercussions due to their rescue work.

In their letter to EU Commissioner Stylianides, these 13 civil society organisations argue that the transfer of responsibility to the Libyan Coastguard to handle the migratory situation in the Mediterranean appears to directly contravene all values upon which the European Union was built. There can be no doubt about the [atrocities unfolding](#) on Libyan soil, including rape, extortion, torture and killings, as well as reports of [slave auctions](#).

Quotes

Brian Killoran, CEO of the Immigrant Council of Ireland, said, “Any attempts to address irregular migration on the Mediterranean Sea are too late - at this stage the only focus must be humanitarian and life-saving. We endorse this call for the European Commission to halt further loss of life by not pushing migrants back to Libya and instead focusing on building more opportunities for safe, legal passage for those fleeing conflict and persecution.”

Panayote Dimitras, Spokesperson of Greek Helsinki Monitor, said, “It is high time the EU honours the high values it claims to adhere to and stops being an accomplice, through barbaric acts or omissions, of deaths by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea or of torture in Libya when denying NGO search and rescue vessels to operate legally as individuals attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea.”

Ariel Ricker, Executive Director of Advocates Abroad, said, “The number of deaths in the Mediterranean are rising uncontrollably, as are the blatant and intentional violations of national and international law. Neither is acceptable and both must end immediately.”

Marta Welander, Executive Director of Refugee Rights Europe, said, “The European Union and its member states can and must step in to ensure an interim solution which safeguards the right to life of hundreds of children, women and men at sea. We call on the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management to take decisive action and show firm leadership on this seemingly non-negotiable matter.”

Dominique Guibert, President of Association Européenne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme, said, “In terms of asylum and migration, the European Union is standing in the shadow of Member States and it is regrettable. We call on the European institutions to at last play a guiding role in the European policy-making and condemn and effectively redress the unworthy attitude of the Member States, who align their migratory policies on those being called for by extreme right parties. The refusal of Member States and the Commission to repeal the Dublin Regulation a serious violation of the rights of individuals, but also a stupidity which traps Member States at the EU external borders in an impossible dilemma, forcing them to choose between receiving thousands of migrants or pushing them back. Because of the Dublin Regulation, the refugee reception system has become purely and simply a means of outsourcing the influx of migrants to countries of first entry, in particular Italy and Greece. If the Mediterranean is so important, this is due to the fact that the road through Turkey has been blocked by the despicable agreement with this country, while cowardly turning a blind eye to Erdogan’s policy that tramples the fundamental rights of so many of Turkey’s citizens. The EU and its Member States must stop treating migrants as ‘hot potatoes’.”

About the letter

The letter was sent to EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management, Mr. Christos Stylianides, on 13 July 2018, signed by 14 civil society organisations working across Europe:

- Advocates Abroad
- Association Européenne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme
- Comité International pour la Protection des Droits de l'Homme
- Greek Helsinki Monitor
- Help Refugees
- Human Rights 360
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- MEENA Centre for Women and Children
- Refugee Info Bus
- Refugee Rights Europe
- Refugee Youth Service
- The School Bus Project
- SolidarityNow
- Women Refugee Route

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