

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## QUOTE

**14 August 2018**

### **Italy/Malta: Stop playing with refugee and migrants' lives by closing ports**

Responding to news that the authorities in Italy and Malta have closed their ports to Aquarius MV, a rescue ship run by SOS Mediterranee, with 141 people aboard, including 73 children, Maria Serrano, Amnesty International's Senior Campaigner on Migration, said:

"European governments must stop playing with human lives. Italy and Malta's disgraceful refusal to allow refugees and migrants to disembark in their ports is pure cruelty. These individuals have braved dangerous journeys and inhumane conditions in Libya only to be stranded at sea as governments shamelessly abdicate their responsibility to protect.

"What's equally alarming is that the Gibraltar, under whose flag Aquarius has been sailing, has threatened to terminate the registration of the ship in a bureaucratic manoeuvre designed to frustrate life-saving search and rescue operations at sea. The relentless efforts of NGOs to rescue lives at sea should be celebrated, not hindered or punished.

"We are calling on European leaders to urgently agree on a predictable and reliable search and rescue system that ensures the prompt disembarkation of survivors at the closest safe port, upholds the law of the sea and the primacy of saving lives in the Mediterranean. Coastal States must ensure their ports are open to those who have been rescued, and other European governments must share the responsibility of processing asylum claims by taking in asylum-seekers."

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**A press conference by SOS Mediterranee and *Doctors Without Borders* will be held at 3pm French time, in SOS Meditteranee Office, in Paris.**

### **Background**

Last week Amnesty International published a [briefing](#), '*Between the devil and the deep blue sea. Europe fails refugees and migrants in the Central Mediterranean*', that reveals the devastating impact of European policies which have resulted in more than 721 deaths at sea in June and July 2018 alone.

The briefing also highlights new Italian policies which have left people stranded at sea for days and analyzes how EU countries are conspiring to contain refugees and migrants in Libya, where they are exposed to torture and other horrific violations and abuses.

Unnecessary delays in disembarkation have forced people in need of urgent assistance – including injured people, pregnant women, torture survivors, people traumatized by shipwrecks and unaccompanied minors – to remain at sea for several days.