

Donald Tusk

President  
European Council

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**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**European Institutions Office**

Dear President Tusk,

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**EUROPEAN COUNCIL 18-19 DECEMBER: MARK INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY BY REFLECTING ON THE HUMAN COST OF EU MIGRATION POLICIES**

The last European Council of this year coincides with International Migrants Day on 18 December, an international day proclaimed in 2000 by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). The UN invited all UN member states, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations to observe this day by various means, including acting to ensure the protection of migrants. To this end, we call on heads of state and government attending the European Council to reflect upon their migration policies, which fail to protect the lives of migrants and put them at even greater risk.

This year has seen record numbers of people fleeing wars and instability. Europe received the largest number of sea arrivals, with more than 207,000 people reported to have crossed the Mediterranean in 2014. It has also been the deadliest year for people trying the sea crossing: 3,419 are reported to have died in the Mediterranean, making it the most dangerous route in the world.

Against this backdrop, the EU's responses to migration continue to be driven by concerns around border security and preventing people from arriving by irregular means. Accessing Europe through safe and legal means is virtually impossible for the majority of those in need of protection or in search of a better life. At the same time, individual member states have erected fences at land borders to stop irregular arrivals, forcing people to make dangerous sea crossings. The response here has also been to strengthen border controls with a new Joint Operation, codenamed Triton, and the phasing out of Italy's Operation Mare Nostrum, which has been the only tangible response to search and rescue needs in the Central Mediterranean. Other measures seek to engage third country cooperation to block irregular migration towards Europe.

A security driven approach focused on strengthening the surveillance of external borders, fighting smuggling-rings, and enhancing cooperation with countries of origin and transit with a view to preventing migration to Europe is not only ill-conceived, ignoring the extraordinary factors pushing many to leave their countries, but also creates more dangers for those attempting to reach the EU.

The EU must provide a better set of responses to these challenges, one that safeguards lives, upholds rights and gives access to protection. We strongly urge the EU and its member states to take urgent measures which will:

- ensure that migrants who arrive at the EU's external land borders are able to access individualised procedures
- reinforce the humanitarian elements of EU border policies by a collective effort towards strengthening SAR operations in the Mediterranean Sea
- ensure that the human rights of migrants are central to all relevant processes and migration cooperation agreements and arrangements with non-EU states.

Yours sincerely,



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