

Rihards Kozlovskis

Minister for the Interior
Presidency of the Council of the European Union

12 June 2015

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



European Institutions Office

Dear Minister,

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JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS COUNCIL ON 15/16 JUNE: EU STATES MUST PROVIDE SAFE AND LEGAL AVENUES FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Amnesty International writes this letter to you in advance of your meeting with fellow ministers at the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 15-16 June 2015. We understand that migration will be on the agenda, as a follow up to the European Council statement of 23 April 2015 on the migratory situation in the Mediterranean, and the European Commission's (EC) Communication of 13 May 2015 on a European Agenda on Migration. In view of the approaching European Council of 25-26 June 2015 and the current global refugee crisis, this Justice and Home Affairs Council falls at a crucial time and offers the opportunity to ensure the development and endorsement of European Union (EU) policies that safeguard lives, uphold rights and give access to protection for refugees. Amnesty International welcomed the recent development on search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean but believes that in order to effectively tackle the dramatic situation of asylum seekers and refugees at the EU's external borders, the EU and its member states should provide safe and legal avenues for people in need of protection.

On 15 June 2015, we will publish "*The Global Refugee Crisis: a conspiracy of neglect*", a report exposing the alarming scale of the growing refugee crisis. Since 2013 for the first time since World War II the number of those forcibly displaced from their homes has exceeded 50 million. With more than half of its population being displaced, Syria represents the world's biggest refugee crisis. Some 4 million women, men and children have fled Syria and are refugees, but only five per cent of them left Syria's neighbouring countries and only 2.2 per cent (less than 90,000 people) of the refugees from Syria in the main host countries in the region have been offered resettlement by the international community. Apart from Germany that has offered 30,000 resettlement and humanitarian admission places, as of 12 March 2015 other EU countries have only pledged 10,137 resettlement places since 2013. This figure pales in comparison to the UNHCR's estimation that around 380,000 vulnerable refugees from Syria are in need of urgent resettlement.

Refugees and asylum seekers are also fleeing from conflicts in e.g. South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Burundi as well as long-standing refugee populations from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. UNHCR identified nearly 1 million refugees in need of resettlement globally¹. Amnesty International is calling on the international community to commit to meet refugee resettlement needs in full. Our organisation estimates that,

¹ UNHCR estimated total projected resettlement needs to be 958,429 refugees in 2015, see UNHCR, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs*, June 2014, p.9, online at: <http://www.unhcr.org/543408c4fda.pdf>

300,000 annual resettlement and humanitarian admission places will be needed every year over the next five years.

Amnesty International welcomes the European Commission's recommendation of 8 June 2015 on a European Resettlement Scheme², which proposes the resettlement into the EU of 20,000 refugees over a two year period. In the context of the global refugee crisis, Amnesty International considers the resettlement of 20,000 a minimum effort. However if the EU-wide resettlement scheme adds to member states' existing pledges on resettlement, it would prove an important step towards alleviating the global refugee crisis.

As of 7 May, the tragic number of people who drowned crossing the Mediterranean stood at 1,829. Amnesty International welcomes the decision to extend the operational area of Joint Operation Triton to 138 nautical miles south of Sicily as a consequence of increased funding and assets provided to prevent further loss of life at sea. However, if people escaping conflicts, violence and persecution are not provided with access to protection at the external land borders of the EU or through safe and legal avenues into Europe, they will continue risking their lives embarking on unsafe sea crossings. As an alternative to smuggling, the EU should focus on the facilitation of access to the EU through legal routes; this would be the most effective way to fight this phenomenon and comprehensively tackle the Mediterranean crisis.

Amnesty International urges European Ministers at this meeting to commit to the following:

- Support, as a minimum, the European Commission's Recommendation on a European Resettlement Scheme for 20,000 refugees
- Increase the number of resettlement places, humanitarian admissions and visas for people in need of international protection
- Facilitate family reunification for refugees who have family members living in the EU
- Ensure that refugees have effective access to asylum at land borders

We strongly urge you to support these measures during your discussions.

Yours sincerely,



Ivorna McGowan
Acting Director
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Office

² Available at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/asylum/general/docs/recommendation_on_a_european_resettlement_scheme_en.pdf