

Donald Tusk

President of the European Council

24 June 2015

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE

Dear President Tusk,

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EU MEMBER STATES MUST SUPPORT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION ON RESETTLEMENT AND OFFER FURTHER SAFE AVENUES TO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Amnesty International writes this letter to you in advance of the European Council of 25-26 June where migration will be discussed 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. Amnesty International believes that this European Council offers a crucial opportunity for EU leaders to tackle both the Mediterranean crisis and the current global refugee crisis in a comprehensive way by offering people in need of protection legal alternatives to reach the European Union (EU) safely. Amnesty International is thus calling on you to use your key influence as President of the Council to ensure member states' agreement on the proposed EU-wide scheme for the resettlement of 20,000 refugees in the EU.

The recent developments on search and rescue initiated by the European Council's decisions of 23 April 2015 to increase the funding and the assets of Frontex's Joint Operation Triton, as well as the following decision to increase its operational area to reach 138 nautical miles off Sicily, represented a much needed response to the immediate search and rescue needs in the Central Mediterranean. Nevertheless, Amnesty International believes that in order to comprehensively address the Mediterranean crisis, the EU and its member states should not turn a blind eye to the global refugee crisis and to the nearly 1 million refugees worldwide who are in need of resettlement¹. On 15 June 2015, our organisation published a report named "*The Global Refugee Crisis: a conspiracy of neglect*", showing the alarming scale of the growing refugee crisis, which for the first time since World War II, has seen the displacement of more than 50 million refugees worldwide since 2013.

The current worst crisis - Syria - is at Europe's doorsteps, with more than half of the Syrian population being displaced and nearly 4 million refugees in the countries neighbouring Syria (Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan) and Egypt. UNHCR identified 380,000 vulnerable women, men and children from Syria in urgent need of resettlement, however, the international community only offered 90,000 resettlement places for Syrians (2.2% of which are in the region neighbouring Syria). Of these 90,000, aside from Germany's 30,000 resettlement and humanitarian admission places, other EU countries have pledged just 10,137 resettlement places since 2013.

Our organisation estimates that the international community, including the EU, should offer annually 300,000 places for resettlement and humanitarian admissions during the next five years. In this context, Amnesty International believes that the EC'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, is a minimum but decisive step towards responding adequately to the global refugee crisis and involving all member states in resettlement activities. As an initial step, it will need further pledges to increase places through national resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes, as well as an increased use of humanitarian visas, and more accessible schemes for family reunification for refugees with family links in Europe.

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>

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

Heads of State and Government will also discuss the emergency system proposed by the EC for the intra-EU relocation of 40,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other EU member states. Amnesty International shares the Commission's assessment that "the EU should not wait until the pressure is intolerable to act: "the volumes of arrivals mean that the capacity of local reception and processing facilities is already stretched thin". A recent fact-finding mission to Greece and follow-up research carried out by Amnesty International revealed that the sharp increase in refugees arriving on Greece's Aegean islands is pushing an already faltering reception system to breaking point and that the new arrivals to Greece, including children, face appalling reception conditions. Poor planning, ineffective use of EU funds combined with a hiring freeze precipitated by the economic crisis has left Greek authorities incapable of meeting the needs and protecting the rights of the soaring numbers of people arriving. Against this backdrop, the relocation mechanism proposed by the EC may contribute to ensuring a more equitable sharing of responsibility in the EU, but ultimately, it would not solve the problems of secondary movement of asylum seekers if it does not take into consideration their consent, their needs, and their right to family unity. Finally, any relocation system could not prove effective until reception and integration systems throughout the EU are harmonised. While the EU aspires for a Common European Asylum System, Amnesty International believes that the opening of more safe and legal routes for refugees to reach EU countries, besides reducing the pressures on refugees to undertake dangerous journeys, would also contribute to the EU taking on a fairer share of a global refugee population and reduce the pressures on frontline EU member states.

Amnesty International agrees that the Mediterranean crisis - which already amounted to the tragic deaths of more than 1,800 people in the first months of 2015 - should be comprehensively tackled and that the irregular and life-risking arrivals through the Mediterranean should be reduced. However, the only way to reach this goal is through the implementation of a comprehensive package of measures which would allow for the safe and legal access into the EU for those seeking international protection. This would also be the most effective approach for the disruption of smuggling networks, since in the face of no legal alternatives, people escaping violence, conflict and persecution will have no other option but to turn to smugglers in order to find protection in Europe. For all these reasons, Amnesty International urges European Heads of State and Government at this European Council to commit to the following:

- Support, as a minimum, the European Commission's Recommendation on a European Resettlement Scheme for 20,000 refugees
- Further 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
- Ensure that, should the intra-EU relocation proposal be agreed, the consent, needs, and right to family unity of asylum-seekers are taken into full account

We strongly urge you to make concrete commitments and to make use of your role as President of the European Council to facilitate member states' support and urgent implementation of these measures.

Yours sincerely,



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