

Donald Tusk  
President of the European Council  
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1049 Brussels

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE**

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Dear President Tusk,

**DELIVERY OF S.O.S. EUROPE PETITION SIGNATURES: OVER HALF A MILLION PEOPLE ASKED EU LEADERS TO PROVIDE STRENGTHENED SEARCH AND RESCUE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.**

Amnesty International is writing to share with you the call made by *more than half a million people* for European Union (EU) leaders to strengthen search and rescue (SAR) efforts to save lives of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. The signatures gathered demonstrate how crucial it will be for the current level of naval and aerial assets set after the extraordinary European Council of 23 April 2015 to remain deployed close to the area where most refugees and migrants need assistance for as long as migration flows by sea continue at current rates.

Amnesty International has documented the dangerous journeys of refugees and migrants crossing the central Mediterranean since the beginning of 2014 and campaigned for a significant increase in SAR activities through a joint European multi-country effort. Since July 2014, **516,673 people** have signed a petition asking European leaders to stop people from dying and suffering at the EU's external borders and to:

- Strengthen search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and the Aegean seas through a joint effort involving all EU member states
- Provide more safe and legal routes to Europe for those fleeing conflict and persecution so they are not forced to take dangerous journeys in the first place; and ensure they have access to international protection when they reach Europe's borders
- Stop cooperating with countries with poor human rights records to restrict migration flows into the EU.

Amnesty International welcomes the long overdue strengthening of the search and rescue capacity in the Mediterranean by the EU and its member states after the extraordinary European Council of 23 April 2015. The measures taken in the Mediterranean have led to a significant decrease in the death toll of migrants and refugees at sea. Our recently published research, '*A safer sea*<sup>1</sup>', shows how EU and member states' measures implemented to step up SAR efforts have proved crucial in saving the lives of people at sea. The death rate of refugees and migrants attempting the crossing dropped from 1 in 16

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *A safer sea: The impact of increased search and rescue operations in the central Mediterranean*, (July 2015)

people losing their life in the Mediterranean in the first few months of this year to 1 in 427 since the new measures came into effect.

Together with 516,673 supporters, Amnesty International therefore warns that the current level of naval and aerial assets will need to remain deployed as close as possible to the area where most refugees and migrants need assistance for as long as migration flows by sea continue at current rates. Any withdrawal of resources, or diversion of their use, will jeopardise the current success in saving lives. We also call on European leaders to address the systemic issues pushing refugees and migrants to undertake dangerous sea crossings, including ensuring access to asylum at land borders and the opening of more safe and legal routes to access Europe. One meaningful way to start will be by significantly increasing resettlement and humanitarian admissions places for refugees.

Thank you in advance for your engagement to save lives and uphold the human rights of refugees and migrants with these urgently-needed measures. We stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,



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