

Save LIFE! Ensuring sea rescue in the Mediterranean and finally implementing solidarity-based refugee policy

For years people have been fleeing war, persecution, hunger and the consequences of climate change across the Mediterranean. Young people in particular dare to flee across the sea to Europe in search of protection and a perspective for a humane life. Often with fatal consequences: Many thousands die every year fleeing to Europe. In 2018 an average of six people died every day trying to cross the Mediterranean. Also in this year drowned already to beginning of October alone over thousand humans in the Mediterranean².

The German government and the governments of the member states of the European Union responded to the increasing number of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016 with a policy of isolation and deterrence, without sustainably eliminating the various causes of flight. They hermetically sealed off the EU's external border and cooperated with authoritarian third countries and dictatorships in order to repel refugees even before they reach the Union's border.

The countries of the European Union, on the other hand, are still watching the ongoing drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. There is no rescue organised by the state.

Non-profit organizations from civil society assume responsibility here to secure the sea rescue chartered in international law and the non-negotiable right to life. Often young Europeans*, using their own health, lead the sea rescue missions to success. The lives of hundreds of thousands of³ people have been saved so far.

The civilian helpers* are organised in associations, federations or NGOs and are supported by donations, especially from civil society. Also many honorary active persons from the youth federations take part in the rescue missions. Numerous youth associations express their solidarity with the helpers in alliances, demonstrations and decisions.

On the other hand, the state itself lacks support for the civilian rescuers*. Numerous European politicians* and institutions are preventing rescue operations, letting overcrowded ships with rescued persons wait for weeks on the open sea in search of open ports. Although the civil rescue missions are based on international maritime law and humanity, numerous politicians* and media criminalise the helpers*.

The failure of European governments to provide aid is a political scandal!

As a result, the lives of refugees continue to be directly threatened. We must now restore the severely damaged confidence in European values, in particular respect for human dignity, human rights and the rule of law.

As youth associations organised in the German Federal Youth Council, we have always advocated "unrestricted solidarity with people fleeing to Europe".⁴ In order to guarantee this, we expect German and European policymakers to finally end the humanitarian catastrophe and to create a solidarity-based and human rights-based refugee policy. That is why we are calling on the Federal Government and the European institutions:

- that the EU fully respects its international and constitutional obligations towards those seeking protection and that all Member States assume their responsibility for a decent reception.

¹ <https://www.uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de/informieren/aktuelles/news/uebersicht/detail/artikel/unhcr-bericht-jeden-tag-6-tote-im-mittelmeer/>, retrieved 27.09.2019

² <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>, released 03.10.2019

³ <https://www.aerzte-ohne-grenzen.de/unser-seenotrettungseinsatz>, retrieved on 09.10.2019 and <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/eu-seit-2015-an-rettung-von-730-000-fluechtlingen-beteiligt,RMJ0dz7>, retrieved on 09.10.2019

⁴ <https://www.dbjr.de/artikel/uneingeschraenkte-solidaritaet-mit-fluechtenden-menschen/>, retrieved 10.10.2019.

- that the EU states fulfil their international obligation to provide sea rescue services by abolishing sanctions for humanitarian aid to refugees and establishing a system of state sea rescue.
- that the ongoing criminalisation and prosecution of civilian sea rescue workers* be ended immediately.
- that secure, transparent and legal channels are created for those seeking protection in the EU, for example through European resettlement programmes, the granting of humanitarian visas or facilitated family reunification.
- establish a regular system for the fair and equitable distribution of poultry in all countries of the European Union, in accordance with the recommendations of the European Refugee Council.
- an allocation of safe harbours by the rescue control centres. International maritime law stipulates that people rescued from distress at sea may only be brought ashore at a "safe harbour" (Art. 98 UNCLOS).
- that, in our humanitarian understanding, countries in which the rescued people are exposed to further dangers or in which their basic needs are not secured cannot offer safe havens - for example Libya or Tunisia.
- that cooperation between the European Union and authoritarian third countries and dictatorships, which for the EU are supposed to fend off migrant women* before they reach the borders of Europe and thereby disregard human rights, be ended.
- that the life-threatening repatriation of refugees to harbours that are unsafe for them is ended, that no structures are set up and supported that act contrary to international law (refoulements, push backs, etc.). Instead, the Federal Government and the EU should participate more closely in the actual fight against the causes of flight through their foreign, development, agricultural, climate, trade, raw materials and fisheries policies, and campaign for the release of all those who seek protection and are interned contrary to international law.

Decided unanimously by the General Assembly on 25-27 October 2019 in Berlin.