

YOUR FENCES KILL. PROVIDE SAFE PASSAGE.

Open letter to the Heads of States of the European Union,
FYROM, Serbia and the President of the European Commission

We are sending you this letter today, together with a lifejacket belonging to one of the 15.000 people rescued at sea by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) since May. This poor quality life vest was often the only security this man, woman or child had whilst trying to cross the sea from Libya to Europe. On these jackets you can read prayers for a safe passage or phone numbers of relatives and friends to be contacted in case they would not make it. This is a reminder that the people embarking on this journey are fully aware of the risks they are taking and the desperation they must feel to put themselves and their families into so much danger.

Millions today flee from war, oppression and torture. Others flee from poverty, persecution and human rights violations. All of them want a better life. Their exit routes are growing scarcer with hosting countries such as Lebanon, Turkey or Jordan reaching their limits. The world is faced with the worst displacement crisis since WW2, yet Europe is closing its borders. Legal definitions of "migrants", "refugees" or "asylum seekers" do not adequately or fairly describe the reality that pushes people to embark on long and dangerous journeys. Every person has a different story to tell on why they choose to put their lives at risk to reach Europe. For MSF, their legal status is not our concern. When people need medical care, food, water, shelter, they should receive this assistance. When they are drowning, they should be rescued.

We have treated the medical

consequences of the migration journey: hypothermia, dehydration, wounds inflicted by abuse and violence and post-traumatic stress disorder. We have also tried to improve living



conditions for people stranded in Greece, Italy, FYROM and Serbia. But all of our work is just filling the gaps left by states that are unwilling or unable to fulfill their responsibilities.

When your ministers gather this Monday for yet another summit

on the so-called 'migration crisis', bear in mind that decisions adopted in previous summits have so far completely failed to improve the situation. Some measures have made the situation worse: fences, forced fingerprinting and frigates hunting smugglers only force people to choose more clandestine and dangerous routes. Lives continue to be lost at sea, in the back of lorries and in make shift camps where people live in miserable conditions. It is time to put an end to the policy of deterrence. These policies have turned a foreseeable and manageable influx of refugees into a humanitarian crisis on Europe's beaches, borders, train stations and motorways. The current approach of "non-reception" and closed borders has caused death, injury and chaos. The only way Europe can stop this misery is to replace the smugglers with a safe, legal and free alternative.

We ask you to adopt measures providing a safe passage. Legal crossing of sea and land borders should be authorized into and inside the EU and transportation facilitated. Humanitarian assistance and access to functioning asylum procedures should be provided at entry points and along migratory routes. Dignified reception conditions have to be offered for all.

Make this life vest redundant; provide a humane and dignified alternative.

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