

Bruxelles, 14 April 2015

Dear Commissioner Avramopoulos, Commissioner Mogherini and Commissioner Timmermans,

Currently, as many as **400 migrants fleeing from Libya are feared to have drowned** after their boat capsized in the Mediterranean, survivors told an aid organisation<sup>1</sup>: a new tragedy is unfolding under our eyes, after the catastrophe of Lampedusa in 2013.

We have also received news that thousands of people were and are currently in distress off the coast of Libya.<sup>2</sup> There are, it seems, pregnant women and children on most of the vessels.<sup>3</sup>

Italian authorities have declared that about **8,500 migrants have been rescued at sea** between Friday and Monday. The majority of operations are currently carried out by Italy, in international waters, while the EU-led Triton operation is still patrolling the area within 30 miles of the Italian coast, "*far from the area where boats in distress actually need to be helped*"<sup>4</sup>.

Last February, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, referring to the death of at least 300 people who were trying to reach Europe from Libya, has said: "*There can be no doubt left (...) that Europe's Operation Triton is a woefully inadequate replacement for Italy's Mare Nostrum*". "*The focus has to be about saving lives. We need a robust search-and-rescue operation in the Central Mediterranean, not only a border patrol.*"

Likewise, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles's Secretary General Michael Diedring has stated that "*If a well-resourced European search and rescue initiative is not put in place, more people will die in their attempt to reach our shores*".<sup>5</sup> Indeed, 9 asylum seekers already drowned today when their boat capsized 80 miles away from the Libyan coast.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence of the improving weather and sea conditions, militia and traffickers will plan an increasing number of departures, leading asylum seekers to risk their lives and try to reach European coasts<sup>7</sup>. Hence, the current emergency situation will continue to deteriorate<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/14/400-drowned-libya-italy-migrant-boat-capsizes>

<sup>2</sup><http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/106>.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150413/local/pregnant-migrant-airlifted-to-malta-as-italy-continues-massive-rescue.563791>.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2015/pbn-listing/iom-applauds-italys-weekend-resc.html>

<sup>5</sup><http://ecre.org/component/content/article/70-weekly-bulletin-articles/967-over-300-migrants-feared-dead-in-new-tragedy-in-mediterranean.html>.

<sup>6</sup><http://it.reuters.com/article/topNews/idITKBN0N414S20150413>.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/13/italy-rescues-nearly-6000-migrants-in-a-single-weekend>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/01/record-number-of-migrants-expected-to-drown-in-mediterranean-this-year>

Meanwhile none of the European Commission's four main areas set out for an European Agenda on Migration (to be presented in May) address the need for real search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

We support Amnesty International's petition<sup>9</sup> calling for:

- Strengthen search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and the Aegean seas through a joint effort involving all EU member states. We ask that these operations to take place in a systemic, regular manner.
- 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 European Union.

And would like to ask you, therefore, to address these urgent issues in the European Agenda on Migration you're about to present, if not sooner.

Furthermore, we would like Commissioner Avramopoulos and Commissioner Mogherini to come to the LIBE Committee to comment these recent events and share their opinion on Amnesty's demands.

Kind Regards

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.sos-europe-amnesty.eu/stop-people-from-suffering-and-dying-at-our-borders-actions/>.

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