

Statement on the occasion of the World Refugee Day 2016

The refugee situation: it's all about European core values!

On the occasion of the World Refugee Day, Caritas Europa reminds the European Union and its Member States that there are solutions to Europe's current solidarity crisis. There is no need to put the lives of migrants and refugees at risk and to unnecessarily prolong their suffering. Caritas continues to believe that Europe's founding values of dignity, equality and respect for human rights are not just hollow words, but make more sense now than ever.

“Our older brother was kidnapped by ISIS and we have no news from him. Our situation became unbearable, so we decided to leave Afghanistan on foot and we have travelled a month and a half to get to Greece. Unfortunately during the trip in Iran we lost our father and we don't know where he is. To get from Turkey to Greece we had to pay 1,000 euros per person to the smugglers for a 5 hour ride, not knowing if we would survive the trip. We hope that our father and our brother are alive and that we can all gather in a safer place. It wasn't a trip. It was a killer trip”, explained Mujdah and Mohebullah, 15 and 8 year-old sister and brother from Afghanistan.

According to the United Nations, since 2014 at least 10,000 people have lost their lives in attempting to reach a safe haven in Europe. The EU restrictive policies prevent people from entering Europe safely, hence resulting in unbearable death tolls. The further externalisation of EU asylum and migration policies through agreements with non-EU countries clearly shows the lack of solidarity with the people fleeing war and persecution.

“I dream of a Europe that promotes and protects the rights of everyone, without neglecting its duties towards all. I dream of a Europe of which it will not be said that its commitment to human rights was its last utopia,” said Pope Francis in his address for the 2016 Charlemagne Prize.

Europe has the means to end the unnecessary deaths and suffering of people who are in urgent need of protection, solidarity and compassion. Caritas Europa advocates for policy solutions that are feasible and realistic. Political will and commitment to human rights are the only elements missing from the equation to make these solutions a reality.

Caritas Europa is calling on the EU and especially its Member States to:

- Invest effectively in saving lives at sea;
- Open more safe and legal channels of entry into the EU, such as by introducing affordable and accessible humanitarian visas and engaging in more resettlement;
- Facilitate family reunification for refugees and migrants, hence fostering integration in receiving countries;
- Stop and reverse the externalisation of EU migration policies;
- Cease using readmission and return agreements as a condition for development aid.

For more information, please contact:

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Note to editors:

- Source for figures from United Nations: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>.
- Pope Francis was awarded the Charlemagne Prize 2016 on 6 May:
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/may/documents/papa-francesco_20160506_premio-carlo-magno.html.