

"Protect our laws and humanity!"

Open Letter by 85 Organizations

To:

Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kyriakos Mitsotakis
President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli
President of the European Council, Charles Michel
President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen

Athens, 6 March 2020 – The undersigned organisations are deeply concerned about recent developments at the Evros border and the Aegean islands where people are stranded at the borders of Europe, instrumentalized for political purposes, and subject to violations of their rights. We are also deeply concerned about the way the authorities of Greece and the European Union are handling new arrivals. Equally alarming are the extreme actions by security forces against refugees and by civilians against staff of human rights and humanitarian organizations. We would also like to point out that the climate of panic and rhetoric of 'asymmetric threat' –also promoted by the authorities– does not reflect reality and seriously affects not only vulnerable refugees- but also our society and the rule of law as a whole.

Specifically:

We firmly express our opposition to the recent decisions of the Greek Governmental Council on Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA), and in particular the adoption of the Emergency Legislative Decree, which stipulates the suspension of the right to seek asylum for all people entering the country and their return without registration, to their countries of origin or transit. Applying such a regulatory provision is inhumane and illegal as it violates the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*, incurs international responsibilities for Greece and endangers human lives. It is beyond dispute that Greece has the sovereign competence to control its borders and to manage any crossings there. Nevertheless, the right to seek asylum is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

We also denounce the attacks on organizations that defend human rights and humanitarian organizations, noting that without the support of these organizations, the refugee management system in Greece would collapse. In addition, solidarity has been stigmatized and become the target of suspicion, which has been also exacerbated by members of the Government, fomenting violence and lawlessness in society in general. We denounce any statements, actions or policies that foment or tolerate bigotry.

We call upon the Greek Government to:

- **Withdraw the illegal and unconstitutional Emergency Legislative Decree** and to respect the obligations of the Greek State concerning the protection of human life and rescue at sea and at the land borders.
- Immediately stop returning people to states where their lives and freedom are at risk, or where they are at risk of being subjected to torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- **Immediately alleviate overcrowding on the islands by relocating asylum seekers to the mainland, protecting their well-being and health.** Priority should be given to the most vulnerable, unaccompanied minors and families with children.
- Take the necessary measures to protect every person from acts of violence, victimization and racism.

We recall that the EU should assume substantial responsibilities for the protection of people on the move in a manner that demonstrates respect for human dignity and lawfulness and as a matter of shared responsibility among EU member states in the context of managing what is, first and foremost, a European issue. The right to asylum and the respect for the principle of non-refoulement are fundamental elements of international and EU law and therefore the authorities of the European Union must take the necessary measures for their protection.

Therefore:

- **The European Commission, as the guardian of the Treaties,** should protect the right to asylum as enshrined in EU law. Therefore, it should reverse the “aspida (shield)” rhetoric used by Greece and urge it to assume its legal obligations.
- EU Member States should re-establish immediately the **mechanisms for the relocation of refugees and asylum seekers from Greece** to other Member States, in a fair and rational manner, with priority given to unaccompanied children. EU Member States should increase resettlement of refugees directly from Turkey.
- EU Member States and institutions should revise the EU-Turkey Statement, which –in addition to legal lacunae– has now proven to be an unpredictable and unsustainable political tool for border management.

In closing, we call on all sides to respect the law and safeguard European democratic values. Any further backsliding will have major consequences on European societies, European democracy and the rule of law.

List of Signatories

ACTIONAID HELLAS
ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL
ACTIONAID ITALIA
ADDART (Greece)
AITIMA (Greece)
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
ANTIGONE (Greece)
ARSIS – ASSOCIATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF YOUTH (Greece)
ASSOCIATION FOR INTEGRATION AND MIGRATION (Czech Republic)
ASSOCIATION FOR LEGAL INTERVENTION (Poland)
ASOCIACIÓN POR TI MUJER (Spain)
BABEL DAY CENTER (Greece)
CARITAS HELLAS
CENTRE DIOTIMA (Greece)
CHANGE MAKERS LAB (Greece)
CHILD AND YOUTH CARE ASSOCIATION (SMAN) (Greece)
DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL (DRC)
DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL GREECE
DUTCH COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES (DCR)
ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENT OF THESSALONIKI (Greece)
ECHO100PLUS (Greece)
EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION (Greece)
ELIX (Greece)
END FGM EUROPEAN NETWORK
EPAPSY (Greece)
EQUAL RIGHTS BEYOND BORDERS (Greece)
EUROPEAN ANTIPOVERTY NETWORK (EAPN)
EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES (ECRE)
FIX IN ART (Greece)
FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE (Greece)
FUNDACION CEPAIM (Spain)
GENERATION 2.0 RED (Greece)
GREEK COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES (GCR)
GREEK FORUM OF MIGRANTS
GREEK FORUM OF REFUGEES
GREEK NETWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO SHELTER AND HOUSING
HELLENIC ANTIPOVERTY NETWORK
HELLENIC LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (HLHR)
HELP REFUGEES / CHOOSE LOVE
HIAS GREECE
HUMANRIGHTS360 (Greece)
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
IMMIGRANT COUNCIL OF IRELAND
INITIATIVE FOR THE DETAINEES' RIGHTS (Greece)
INTER ALIA (Greece)
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE (IRC)
INTERSOS HELLAS
IRISH ANTIPOVERTY NETWORK
LEGAL CENTRE LESVOS (Greece)

LEROS SOLIDARITY NETWORK (Greece)
LESVOS SOLIDARITY (Greece)
MED.IN MEDICAL INTERVENTION (Greece)
MEDECINS DU MONDE – GREECE (MDM - GREECE)
MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES – GREECE (MSF – GREECE)
MELISSA NETWORK (Greece)
METADRASI (Greece)
NETWORK FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHTS (Greece)
OMNES (Greece)
ORGANIZATION EARTH (Greece)
OXFAM
PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL (Belgium)
PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION ON UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS (PICUM)
PRAKSIS (Greece)
RED ACOGE (Spain)
REFUGEE LEGAL SUPPORT (RLS) (Greece)
REFUGEE RIGHTS EUROPE (RRE)
REFUGEE SUPPORT AEGEAN (RSA)
REFUGEE TRAUMA INITIATIVE (Greece)
SAFE PASSAGE INTERNATIONAL
SCHEDIA STIN POLI –ARTISTIC PEDAGOGIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION (Greece)
SEA OF SOLIDARITY (Greece)
SERVICE CIVIL INTERNATIONAL-HELLAS
SOLIDARITYNOW (Greece)
SOS RACISMO (Spain)
STATE OF CONCEPT (Greece)
STIL-UTRECHT (Netherlands)
SYMBIOSIS-SCHOOL OF POLITICAL STUDIES (Greece)
SYNDICAT INTERPROFESSIONNEL DE TRAVAILLEUSES ET TRAVAILLEURS (SIT) (Switzerland)
TERRE DES HOMMES HELLAS
THE HOME PROJECT (Greece)
THESSALONIKI PRIDE (Greece)
THESS DICTIO – VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS’ NETWORK OF THESSALONIKI (Greece)
TRANSGENDER SUPPORT ASSOCIATION (Greece)
VICTORIA SQUARE PROJECT (Greece)
WORLD WITHOUT WARS AND VIOLENCE (Greece)