

Statement on the EU Council conclusions of 15-16 October 2015

The Council can still prove at the Valetta summit that humanity and solidarity are fundamental European values

Caritas Europa regrets that the European Council's decisions of 15 and 16 October 2015 are not responding to Europeans' plea to address the current migration situation with humanity and solidarity.

The Council's proposal to reinforce cooperation with non-EU countries in order to strengthen the external borders of the EU is clearly removing people and their needs from the central focus of policies. These kinds of practices sacrifice the well-being of millions of people who are escaping man-made conflicts and climate-made poverty condemning them to a life in limbo in reception facilities in non-EU countries, which are poorer and worse equipped to offer adequate help than the EU.

Caritas Europa thinks that shifting the responsibility for refugees and migrants from the EU to poorer non-EU countries reinforces the image of Europe as being "elderly and haggard, feeling less and less a protagonist in the world" as Pope Francis told European leaders in November 2014.

According to testimonies from Caritas staff in the Member States at the EU external borders, sub-Saharan migrants arriving in Sicily are not allowed to leave the boats that bring them to harbour. They are subjected to quick procedures to evaluate their possibility to seek asylum in Europe. Those coming from so-called safe countries are immediately given an order to return or are directly transferred to detention centre. They are not given a chance to enter the hot-spot facility in place and to apply for asylum, as provided by international protection law.

"These reports speak of practices that go against the Geneva Convention, and it is absolutely terrifying that this is happening in the EU and that Member States are proposing to set up more hot-spots. These people do not need more Fortress Europe; they need Europe's solidarity and humanity. They need constructive long-term solutions that put an end to all this unnecessary suffering" said Shannon Pfohman, Head of Policy and Advocacy of Caritas Europa.

Therefore, ahead of the Valetta Summit on cooperation between the EU and the African Union, we urge EU governments to ensure support to the people where they are:

1. Engage in efforts for peace and development in countries suffering from violence and poverty. Increase official development assistance from 0.42% of Gross National Income to the promised 0.7%;
2. Refrain from threatening to punish non-EU countries with cuts in development aid for failing to include readmission and return clauses in bilateral or regional agreements;
3. Protect the victims of human smuggling, instead of criminalising them, by establishing effective controls to crack down on smugglers operating inside the EU. In parallel, enhance the European search and rescue operations at EU external borders and lift carrier sanctions;
4. Ensure high humane standards for reception and long-term integration of migrants and asylum seekers;

5. Devise alternatives to the Dublin rules to suppress the rule of the first country of arrival. Promote mutual recognition between Member States on asylum decisions, and promote solidarity and responsibility sharing as key principles of EU migration policies;
6. Open more safe and legal channels to enter into the EU, such as resettlement, humanitarian visa, family reunification, private sponsorship and lifting of visa requirements for asylum seekers originating from countries in war;
7. Promote alternatives to detention and coercive measures, in particular for unaccompanied minors, pregnant women and adults with minor children, and train police, border guards and other staff, i.e. social service providers, working with migrants and asylum seekers to ensure respect of human rights and human dignity.

Caritas Europa is hopeful that the European leaders will prove in Valetta that solidarity and humanity are fundamental cornerstones of the EU's identity.

For more information, please contact

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