



Central European Refugee-assisting Organizations Criticize European Response to the Refugee Crisis

Appeal: Overcome Division – Organize Joint Refugee Reception

Vienna, 15 January 2016

We, representatives of Central European refugee-assisting organizations, members of ECRE, are deeply concerned about the inadequate response of Europe, as a responsible region of wealthy nations, in dealing with the global refugee crisis. In 2015 we saw fences instead of humanity, chaos instead of reasonable policies, and political egoism instead of solidarity and cooperation. We are convinced that Europe's failure to receive refugees in a humane and dignified way and in a manner which shows solidarity questions the idea of European integration and betrays the fundamental values of Europe.

We are appalled that European governments continue not to offer enough safe and legal ways for protection-seekers to reach EU territory. As a consequence, in 2015 more than a million refugees had to make the life-threatening passage over sea, resulting in almost 3700 men, women and children dying in the Central Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. Without immediate action, the situation could worsen in 2016. We therefore call on Europe to implement safe and legal channels to protection: resettlement, humanitarian admission programmes, broader family reunification, visa liberalization and the cessation of push-backs.

Refugee-supporting organizations from Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Switzerland call on the European Union and European states to overcome their fatal division concerning asylum policies. The governments should, without delay, establish a system that offers, even at first EU entry points, fast registration and identification as well as immediate humanitarian assistance.

Proper identification of vulnerability as well as the respect of already existing ties of refugees in the EU shall be part of the new common system.

Our vision is that the whole of the Central European region must become a welcoming place for refugees where every country will take fair responsibility in receiving and integrating refugees at harmonized standards. Until this is the case, people in need, regardless of their country of origin, should be allowed safe passage through the Balkan route.

Everywhere in Central Europe there is a strong trend towards racist and populist political movements. Xenophobia is also becoming dangerously mainstream. The terrorist attacks in Paris and violence in Cologne on New Year's Eve are being

exploited to place under suspicion hundreds of thousands of innocent refugees. Security concerns should be addressed without jeopardizing human rights and dignity.

We believe that Central European states have to work together to fulfill their legal and humanitarian obligation to preserve the institution of asylum in the region, which itself produced millions of refugees in the last century. We call on our governments to ensure fair and transparent access to national asylum systems, be it at sea, land or airports.

Joint Declaration of Central European members of ECRE - European Council on Refugees and Exiles

Asylkoordination Österreich, Austria

Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst, Austria

Verein Projekt Integrationshaus Wien, Austria

Magyar Helsinki Bizottság - Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungary

Organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům (OPU) - Organization for Aid to Refugees, Czech Republic

Liga za ľudské práva - The Human Rights League, Slovakia

Pravno-informacijski center nevladnih organizacij (PIC) - Legal centre for the protection of human rights and environment, Slovenia

Centar za mirovne studije (CMS) - Center for Peace Studies, Croatia

Fundacja Refugee - Refugee Foundation, Poland

Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka - Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

PRO ASYL, Germany

Diakonie Deutschland, Germany

Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe, Switzerland