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## Media centre



### “Callous” EU politics on migrants costing lives – Zeid

GENEVA (20 April 2015) - In the wake of the loss of 700 or more lives after a boat carrying migrants capsized at the weekend, the UN Human Rights Chief on Monday urged European Union governments to take a “more sophisticated, more courageous and less callous approach” to coping with the flows of migrants towards Europe.

“As we learn of yet more men, women and children who have lost their lives in their search for better and safer lives abroad, I am horrified but not surprised by this latest tragedy. These deaths, and the hundreds of others that preceded them in recent months were sadly predictable,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said. “They are the result of a continuing failure of governance accompanied by a monumental failure of compassion.”

“While Italy’s *Mare Nostrum* programme, which ended last October, was a valiant, and in many ways successful, effort to save lives, the scaled-down Operation Triton is simply not fit for purpose,” the High Commissioner said, adding that it was totally inadequate and “more geared to border control and policing the seas than to saving lives.”

“Stopping the rescue of migrants in distress has not led to less migration, nor indeed to less smuggling, but merely to more deaths at sea, as this recent tragedy shows,” he added. “Triton should immediately be replaced by a robust, European-wide, State-led and well-resourced search and rescue capability in the Mediterranean.”

“Human rights violations form the backdrop of these desperate sea voyages. We have repeatedly underscored that no one who has food to eat, who is safe from torture, and rape, and from falling bombs, who has healthcare for his family, education for her children, decent and productive work would readily embark on these perilous journeys. Amidst all the talk of ‘pull factors,’ let us understand that these are the ‘push factors,’ and let us be clear that today’s movements across the Mediterranean are rarely entirely ‘voluntary,’ in the true sense of the term.”

“Europe is turning its back on some of the most vulnerable migrants in the world, and risk turning the Mediterranean into a vast cemetery rather than acknowledge that European economies and societies need the low-skilled labour that migrants are desperate to contribute, that refugees have a right to seek asylum, or that families are entitled to live together, and opening up safe and legal channels for their entry,” Zeid said. It is precisely this lack of regular channels, coupled with harsh controls at external borders, which have led migrants to turn to the flourishing and increasingly organised smuggling industry along Europe’s southern borders, he said, adding “Migrant smugglers are the symptom, not the cause of this wretched situation.”

“It is time for politicians to show courageous leadership on this issue, instead of joining the mindless clamour for ever harsher deterrence policies. Not only do such policies not work, they operate at an unacceptable cost in terms of human lives, human suffering and human rights,” the High Commissioner said. “I don’t know how many more tragedies of this type have to occur before European Governments commit themselves to placing the saving of lives, and coherent governance of migration, ahead of short-sighted, short-term political reactions pandering to the xenophobic populist movements that have poisoned public opinion on this issue.”

The fact remains that all migrants, regardless of their legal status, how they arrive at sea borders, where they started their journey, or their race, religion or nationality, are entitled to their human rights, the High Commissioner said.

“I call on the international community to urgently put in place an independent inquiry into these events, and commit my Office to support any such inquiry. We owe no less to the scores of migrants who have suffered death, injury and other horrific human rights violations in their attempts to reach Europe.”

ENDS

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