

Open letter

FAO: Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament
Members of the European Parliament on the AFET Committee
Members of the European Parliament on the LIBE Committee
Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council
Antonis Samaras, EU Presidency
José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission
Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs
Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
Ilkka Laitinen, Executive Director, Frontex
Robert Visser, Executive Director, EASO

14 March 2014

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

On 6 March 2014, over 100 organisations from over 30 countries including Association Européenne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (AEDH), Amnesty International, Caritas Europa, CCME - Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, European Network Against Racism, Human Rights Watch, International Catholic Migration Commission, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), Jesuit Refugee Service Europe, Reporters Sans Frontières and Save the Children EU Office launched a **campaign** to call on European governments and the EU institutions to make a concerted European effort to offer protection to those fleeing the conflict in Syria in a spirit of solidarity with Syria's neighbouring countries. This campaign **petitions** European leaders to act now to ensure access to protection for the men, women and children fleeing the conflict in Syria.

It has been three years since the outbreak of the unrest in Syria that gradually led to an internal armed conflict. The scale of this conflict is well known: over 2.4 million people, half of whom are children, are currently registered as refugees. UNHCR estimates that there will be 4 million refugees in the region by the end of 2014. In comparison, just 81,000 Syrians had sought protection in the EU, Norway and Switzerland by end of February 2014; representing just over 3% of the total number of people who have fled. Peace talks in Geneva on the situation in Syria held under the auspices of the UN failed in February 2014, leaving no end in sight to the violence and suffering.

UNHCR characterizes the flight of civilians from Syria as a refugee movement and that persons fleeing Syria require international protection.¹ While recognition rates for refugees fleeing the conflict are high in most European countries, many refugees often face insurmountable hurdles or life-threatening challenges in accessing the territory to be able to benefit from this protection. These challenges and barriers have been reflected in several reports, including from ECRE², Pro Asyl³ and Amnesty International⁴.

Refugees have little or no safe and legal means of accessing protection in Europe. Acquiring visas to travel to Europe is virtually impossible due to difficulties in obtaining documents. People with protection needs have few possibilities to apply for protection or humanitarian visas in European embassies in the region. Stringent family reunification requirements mean that those who have family in Europe cannot always be reunified with them. In addition, the number of resettlement and humanitarian admission places for Syrian refugees offered by European States remains very low in view of the numbers hosted by the neighbouring countries.

¹ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, pp 7-8, 2013.

² ECRE/ELENA, Information Note on the Treatment of Syrian Asylum Applications in Europe, 2013.

³ Pro Asyl, Pushed Back: Systematic Human Rights Violations Against Refugees in the Aegean Sea and at the Greek-Turkish Land Border, 2013.

⁴ Amnesty International, Frontier Europe: Human Rights Abuses on Greece's Border with Turkey, 2013.

Access to protection is further undermined by deliberate deterrents at the EU's external borders such as push-back operations, fences and European states' incapacity to ensure effective rescue at sea for migrants' boats in distress. The persistent allegations of push backs in particular at the Greek-Turkish border and the growing number of refugees and migrants, including those fleeing the conflict in Syria, dying at the EU's Southern and South-Eastern land and sea borders is simply unacceptable. Such practices undermine the credibility of the EU's common policy on asylum as a whole. All efforts must be undertaken to ensure that fundamental rights, in particular the right to asylum and the principle of *non refoulement*, are respected in practice at the EU's borders so as to ensure that all protection claims, including from those fleeing the Syrian conflict are properly examined.

The undersigning organisations have identified a number of **crucial measures** that European governments should implement urgently in order to create safe and legal channels for Syria's refugees to reach Europe and to ensure effective access to protection and fair and efficient asylum procedures in EU Member States for those arriving at the EU's borders. These measures include granting access to protection through embassies, facilitating family reunification, offering resettlement and humanitarian admission places, continuing the suspension of all returns to Syria and neighbouring countries, respecting the principle of *non refoulement* at land, air and sea borders and guaranteeing prompt and effective access to asylum procedures.

We call on the EU institutions and EU agencies, Frontex and EASO, to take all measures at their disposal to support, encourage and enforce at the EU level the effective implementation of such measures for refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria. We call in particular on:

The European Commission to:

- Develop European Commission guidelines on a common approach to humanitarian visas for protection reasons and to promote the possibility to apply for international protection through EU embassies in third countries.
- Encourage Member States to make full use of funding opportunities for the resettlement of refugees from Syria as one of the common Union resettlement priorities under the Asylum and Migration Fund.
- Allocate emergency funding to address the situation of Syria's refugees within the EU and in the countries in the region where necessary and appropriate.
- Pursue infringement proceedings against the States that are found to be in breach of the EU asylum *acquis*, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Schengen Borders Code.

The Council and the European Parliament to:

- Support an EU moratorium on returning people to Syria to ensure that no person is returned to a place where they may risk persecution, serious harm or being exposed to conflict and generalised violence. People should not be returned to countries already hosting large numbers of refugees from Syria and to any country where they may risk violations of their human rights.
- Encourage the use of appropriate solidarity measures with EU Member States facing an increase in the number of asylum applications, including from Syria where necessary to ensure swift and effective access to protection for refugees arriving in the EU.

Frontex to:

- Ensure that joint operations on the Greek-Turkish and Bulgarian-Turkish borders are carried out in a protection sensitive manner in line with its fundamental rights strategy by raising awareness of international protection obligations amongst border officials and enhancing training initiatives, including through intensified cooperation with EASO, UNHCR and NGOs.
- Ensure that EUROSUR and other sophisticated surveillance technology at the EU's external borders is used for the purpose of saving lives and does not impede access to international protection in the EU to those fleeing persecution and conflict.

EASO to:

- Continue to support Member States in ensuring a swift and fair examination of protection needs of those fleeing the conflict in Syria, including through pooling of expertise in the field of COI, training of caseworkers and the provision of interpreters in particular in Member States facing a sudden increase of the numbers of asylum applications.

- Further enhance reception capacities of EU Member States through targeted solidarity measures in close cooperation with UNHCR and NGOs and engage in contingency planning as considered necessary.
- Use all means at its disposal to facilitate and support Member States' activities with regard to the resettlement of refugees from Syria in close cooperation with UNHCR and NGOs, such as support on the use of available EU funding for resettlement, preparation for potential joint selection missions, and direct assistance to less experienced Member States on reception and integration post arrival.

Many refugees, other than those fleeing the conflict in Syria, face the same barriers to protection in Europe. Therefore, many of these recommendations are equally vital for them. Nevertheless, the conflict in Syria has generated the largest refugee movement since the Rwandan genocide and is described as the defining refugee crisis of our era and as such needs specific attention. A crisis of this magnitude on our doorstep requires European solidarity. We are counting on you to make a stand for what is right.

SIGNING ORGANISATIONS

European/International Level

Association Européenne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (AEDH)
Amnesty International
Caritas Europa
CCME - Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe
European Council on Refugees & Exiles
Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
European Network Against Racism
Human Rights Watch
International Catholic Migration Commission
International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
Jesuit Refugee Service Europe
Reporters Sans Frontières
Save the Children EU Office

Austria

Asylkoordination
Caritas Austria
Diakonie Österreich
Frauenhetz - Feministische Bildung, Kultur und Politik
LeEZA (Liga für emanzipatorische Entwicklungszusammenarbeit)
Plattform 2000frauen
SOS Mitmensch
Verein Integrationshaus
UKI - Unterstützungskomitee zur Integration von MigrantInnen

Belgium

Belgian Refugee Council (CBAR-BCHV)
Broederlijk Delen
Caritas International Belgium
CIRE
CNCD -11.11.11
Flemish Refugee Action
Medecins du Monde Belgium

Bulgaria

Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
Bulgarian Lawyers for Human Rights Foundation
Bulgarian Red Cross
Caritas Bulgaria
Council of the Women Refugees in Bulgaria

Croatia

Autonomous Trade Union of Service Sector of Croatia/Samostalni sindikat uslužnih djelatnosti Hrvatske
Centar za građanske inicijative Porec / Centre for Civil Initiatives Porec
Centre for Peace Studies
Croatian Law Centre

Cyprus

Future Worlds Centre
KISA

Czech Republic

OPU

Denmark

Danish Refugee Council
DFUNK – Danish Refugee Council Youth
Tværkulturelt Center (The Intercultural Christian Centre)
Women's Council

Estonia

Estonian Refugee Council
Estonian Human Rights Centre

Finland

Finnish Red Cross
Finnish Refugee Council

France

Secours Catholique Caritas France
Forum réfugiés-Cosi
France terre d'asile

FYR Macedonia

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association

Germany

Arbeiterwohlfahrt
Jesuit Refugee Service Germany

Greece

Greek Council for Refugees
Greek Forum of Refugees
Greek Helsinki Monitor
Initiative of Detainees Rights
Klimaka
KSPM-Ecumenical Refugee Program
Caritas Hellas

Hungary

Hungarian Helsinki Committee
Menedék

Ireland

Irish Refugee Council
JRS Ireland

Italy

Italian Council for Refugees (CIR)
Jesuit Refugee Service Italy
Asilo in Europa

Kosovo

Civil Rights Program Kosovo

Lithuania

Lithuanian Red Cross

Luxembourg

Caritas Luxembourg

Malta

aditus

Monaco

Caritas Monaco

Norway

NOAS
Norwegian Refugee Council

Poland

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Portugal

Jesuit Refugee Service Portugal

Romania

Jesuit Refugee Service Romania
Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR)

Serbia

Asylum Protection Centre
Grupa 484

Spain

Accem
Caritas Spain
CEAR
Jesuit Service for Migrants Spain
Rescate

Sweden

Caritas Sweden
Jesuit Refugee Service Sweden
Swedish Red Cross

Switzerland

Gemeinschaft Christlichen Lebens (GCL)-Schweiz
Swiss Council for Refugees

The Netherlands

Dutch Council for Refugees
Foundation for Refugee Students UAF

Turkey

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly
Human Rights Agenda Association
Human Rights Association (IHD)
Human Rights Research Association
Kaos GL
Mazlum-Der (Association for Human Rights and Solidarity with Oppressed People)
Mülteci-Der

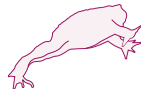
United Kingdom

Asylum Aid
British Refugee Council
City of Sanctuary
Crucible Centre for Human Rights Research
Freedom from Torture
Northern Refugee Centre
Refugee Action
Regional Refugee Forum North East
Scottish Refugee Council
Student Action for Refugees (STAR)
Welsh Refugee Council
Muslim Aid

asylkoordination
österreich

Caritas
Austria

Diakonie



LEZA
LIGA FÜR ERMÄNGERUNGSPOLITIK
ENTWICKLUNGSZUSAMMENARBEIT



SOS
MITMENSCH



UKI
Unterstützungskomitee
zur Integration von Migrantinnen

BCHV - CBAR

Broederlijk Delen
OMDAT HET ZUIDEN PLANNEN HEEFT

caritas
international

CIRÉ
coordination et initiatives
pour réfugiés et étrangers

CNGC 11.11.11
UN COMBAT DE PLEINS DROITS

Vluchtelingenwerk
VLAANDEREN



BULGARIAN LAWYERS
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

BULGARIAN
RED CROSS



Centar za građanske
inicijative Poreč
Centro per le iniziative
civili di Parenzo



CM^S
Centar za mirovne [studije]



kisa
Identity, Equality, Empowerment
Equality, Support, Assistance

ORGANIZACE
PRO POMOC
UPRCHUJÍCUM

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL



Tvær-
KULTURELT
CENTER



INIMÕIGUSTE KESKUS
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE
SEIKATPÕI TOIPÄRANÄHTOODEKKA

Eesti
Pagulasabi
ESTONIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Finnish Red Cross

Finnish
Refugee Council

Caritas
France
Secours Catholique

forumréfugiés
www.forumrefugies.org



GREEK
COUNCIL
REFUGEES



GREEK
HELSINKI
MONITOR



Κλίμακα



Menedék
Segítségnyújtó Központ



caritas europa

ccme
churches' commission for migrants in europe

ecre
European Council
on Refugees and Exiles

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RESEAU EURO-MEDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

European Network Against Racism
Réseau européen contre le racisme

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

ICMC
International Catholic
Migration Commission

irct
International Rehabilitation
Council for Torture Victims



REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Save the Children



centro
astalli
JRS SERVIZIO DEI CENTRI
PER I RIFUGIATI IN ITALIA

Irish Refugee
Council

CRPK
CIVIL RIGHTS PROGRAM KOSOVO
PROGRAM PER TE DREJTITIA CIVILE KOSOVE
PROGRAM ORGANIZACIONI PRAVA KOSOVO



caritas
LUXEMBOURG

aditus
accessing rights

NOAS
Norwegian Organisation
for Asylum Seekers

NRC
NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

HR HELSINKI FOUNDATION
for HUMAN RIGHTS



APC
Asylum Protection Center



ACCeM
www.acecm.es

Cáritas
Española

CEA(R)
Comisión Española
de Ayuda al Refugiado

SJM
servicio jesuita a migrantes



Caritas
SVERIGE

RödaKorset



ORGANISATION SUISSE
D'AIDE AUX REFUGIES
www.osar.ch

VluchtelingenWerk
Nederland

UAF
Studie en werk voor hoger
opgeleide vluchtelingen



KA
OS
GL



MÜLTECI-DER
Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği

Asylum Aid
Protection from Persecution



City of Sanctuary

crucible
Centre for Human Rights Research

Freedom from Torture
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture

Muslim Aid
Serving Humanity

northern
refugee
centre

refugee.
action

ORRF
north east
REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM
The European Refugee Forum Network

scottish
refugee
council



Welsh Refugee Council
Cyngor Ffarduriaid Cymru