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EU refugee crisis - The time has come for the EU to act as one

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The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the EU institutions and bodies. Any EU citizen, resident, or an enterprise or association in a Member State, can lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman offers a fast, flexible and free means of solving problems with the EU administration.

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Statement of the European Ombudsman, **Emily O'Reilly**

"In recent days we have seen several Member States, many ordinary citizens, and civil society groups demonstrating remarkable and humbling leadership as they welcome refugees to their communities.

EU institutions and all Member States must now take their cues from those citizens and act to alleviate the immediate suffering. The EU must use its immense diplomatic, economic and moral capacity to find ways to tackle the wider issues of Middle Eastern security.

The alternative is unthinkable. Many believed that the economic crisis was 'make or break time' for the Union. Now we face a new 'last chance' ; how we respond to the plight of terrified men, women and children screaming for our help, and how we deal with the underlying causes of that human misery in solidarity with global partners.

The European Commission will this week propose additional asylum measures including tools to deal with this crisis in a coordinated, effective and meaningful way. But it can only do so if the Member States support the Commission in that role.

That support in turn must flow from a shared recognition that there are few novel elements in the current refugee crisis.

Eighty years ago Jewish people and many others fled a regime which broke all moral boundaries. Many of those who fled for their lives then, and in other crises in Europe since, were confronted by the same confused ethical mess as those now fleeing Syria and elsewhere. Familiar issues of xenophobia, denial, and political short-termism afflict the refugees of 2015 just as they did those of the 1930s and beyond.

No one can deny the complexity of this crisis, no one can provide immediate or easy answers. But what distinguishes the European Union of 2015 from the Europe in the 1930s and since then is our much stated commitment to the rights of the human being, now encoded in multiple European and international treaties, and most recently in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

These codes must now be taken down from the walls of our institutions and become the daily, lived, road map through this crisis.

The EU was created to stop war in Europe. The solidarity shown then can still work to meet this latest challenge but only with courage, with selflessness, and with political leadership that looks to a legacy that stretches beyond the next electoral cycle.

As European Ombudsman, in addition to investigating alleged breaches of human rights, and other complaints against poor administration at EU level, I will work closely with my colleagues in the European Network of Ombudsman towards this same goal of helping to ensure that fundamental rights are respected on the ground. "