

Press Release

Europe must accept the boat people fleeing Libya

MSF criticizes inconsistent European policies claiming to protect civilians by engaging in a war while closing its borders to them

Paris, May 19, 2011 – Médecins Sans Frontières is publishing an open letter today in 11 newspapers * to the leaders of the States of the European Union involved in the war in Libya.

In the letter, the organization criticizes the European "policy doublespeak" that claims to be conducting a war to protect civilians while closing its borders to the victims of that same war on the pretext of preventing a massive inflow of illegal immigrants.

"The European States involved in the war in Libya are shirking their obligations, both legal and moral, and are neglecting the victims of the war to which they are a party," says Dr Unni Karunakara, International President of MSF. "The words and the actions of our leaders, presented against a backdrop of the battle against illegal immigration, actually restrict the access of the victims of war to Europe. This political cynicism is shameful."

MSF further emphasizes the discrepancy between the reception offered by Tunisia and Egypt, States bordering Libya, which have accepted nearly 630,000 people fleeing Libya, and that provided by the European States which have turned back boat people – who are risking their lives to reach Europe – from their territorial lands and waters.

"The people we are seeing in Lampedusa tell us about the threats and violence they have been subjected to in Libya: some have been beaten or have seen their friends die in front of their eyes," says Loris De Filippi, MSF Director of operations. "They arrive exhausted, often suffering from hypothermia, after travelling for long hours and risking their lives. What they find when they reach Europe are unacceptable reception conditions and total uncertainty regarding their future."

This open letter also notes the legal obligation to protect the rights of victims of war by "guaranteeing their *non-refoulement* from Europe's territorial waters and lands to a war zone and by ensuring that they are received properly in Europe and have access to asylum procedures when they so request."

The open letter is published today in : Die Presse, Der Standard (Austria), Le Soir, De Standaard (Belgium), Berlingske Tidende (Denmark), Le Monde (France), Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica, (Italy), Svenska Dagbladet (Sweden), Le Temps (Switzerland), European Voice (UE).

Recipients of the MSF Open letter:

Mr Werner Faymann, Federal Chancellor and M. Michael Spindelegger, Vice-Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Austria), Mr Yves Leterme, Prime Minister (Belgium), M. Petr Nečas, Prime Minister (Czech Republic), M. Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Prime Minister and M. Lene Espersen, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Denmark), Mrs Angela Merkel, Chancellor (Germany), M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President (France), Mr Rutte, Prime Minister (Netherlands), Mr Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister (Italy), Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister (Luxemburg), M. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister (Norway), Mr José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Prime Minister (Spain), Mr Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister (Sweden), Mr David Cameron, Prime Minister (United Kingdom), Mr

Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the European Union, Mr Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Mrs Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy

Médecins Sans Frontières' teams are aiding victims of the war in Libya in Italy (Lampedusa), Libya (Misrata, Benghazi and Zintan) and Tunisia. They are daily witnesses to the impacts of the conflicts on civilians.