Dear Heads of State and Government,

We are civil society organisations, which are supported, collectively, by hundreds of thousands of people across Europe, working with those less fortunate to alleviate poverty, provide essential aid and defend people’s rights.

With xenophobic populism on the rise across Europe and the globe, this is an appeal for leadership to uphold the rights and values that have been founding principles of the European Union for 60 years. Together, we need to prevent legitimate concerns about migration management from being hijacked and used to derail the European project.

On a daily basis, we witness widespread solidarity with people who are fleeing brutal wars, persecution, human rights violations, instability, and extreme poverty. Throughout Europe and the world, we see people welcome refugees and migrants into their communities, open up their homes and donate money, materials and time to help. Only this week, many of them travelled to Brussels to call on you to uphold your commitments to relocate asylum seekers from Greece and “Bring Them Here”. We also hear people expressing their concerns about the future, asking their governments to show leadership and respond to the arrival of large numbers of people.

We take pride in the European commitment to international law and human rights and we look to you to foster and promote this commitment at home and abroad. Yet when increasing numbers of people in need arrived in the summer of 2015, Europe failed to come together and respond with humanity, dignity, and solidarity. To this day, European nations are unwilling to respond in line with their obligations under international and European law, defaulting to responses that keep people far away and out of sight.

We hear you repeating your commitment to European values – respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. But we expect to see them in your actions, too. Too many leaders have been preoccupied with stopping people from reaching Europe, at the risk of reducing access to protection for those who need it the most.

You have the responsibility to manage migration in a fair manner that addresses the legitimate concerns of citizens. It must be principled and based on facts, not on populist rhetoric. Strength doesn’t mean turning away those most in need. Strength is about showing a way forward that upholds values.

Further, if the EU and its member states want to remain credible international actors, they cannot expect countries like Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to host millions of refugees, while simultaneously pushing migrants and refugees back at EU borders, stranding thousands in inhumane living conditions on the Greek islands, or pushing them back into an uncontrolled conflict zone like Libya. Your decisions have life and death consequences, and if you continue to lower standards, countries around the globe will follow suit.
Instead of countering the rise of xenophobic populists, Europe’s response has too often been to copy their recipes. But an approach based on deterrence and border closures cannot override an effective long-term policy. We expect statesmanship that stands up for humanity and dignity and that addresses people’s fears, instead of fuelling them. We expect sustainable, long-term migration policies that guarantee respect for people’s rights rather than pushing them into danger. These include expanding safe and regular pathways to Europe, such as humanitarian and other visas, increasing resettlement spaces and improving access to family reunification schemes, as well as improving worker mobility across skill levels. Other global concerns such as conflict and instability, poverty, inequality and climate change must remain at the top of the European agenda.

You and your governments must assess the impact of your policies on the human rights and living conditions of women, men and children on the move, as well as Europe’s long standing commitment to uphold these rights and improve the lives of people everywhere.

On the brink of the European Union’s 60th anniversary we ask you to show solidarity, respect for humanity and dignity, and responsibility. We ask you to be truly inspiring leaders for the future. Our commitment to the European Union’s core values cannot falter. Only a Europe that really stands by its values can be a strong and credible leader in a world shaken by increasing populism and so-called alternative facts.

European history is full of people who were forced to flee their homes due to war and persecution. The work European nations have done to develop and protect the rights of people over the last 70 years cannot be lost. Only a Europe that defends the rights of everyone, without exception, is a Europe we can be proud of.

Signatories

1. A Proposito di Altri Mondi Onlus
2. ACAT
3. ACRA
4. ACT Alliance EU
5. Action Against Hunger
6. ActionAid Italy
7. ADP Amici dei Popoli
8. African Media Association Malta
9. Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme
10. AI.BI. Amici dei Bambini
11. AIDOS
12. Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG)
13. AMERA International
14. Amnesty International
15. Anna Lindh National Network in Finland
OAI – Associazione Organizzazioni Italiane cooperazione e solidarietà internazionale
ARCI
ARCS
Arsis
ASGI - Associazione Studi Giuridici Immigrazione
Asociacion en Prevencion y Asistencia de la Violencia APAV
Asociación pro derechos humanos de España (APDHE)
ASPEm Onlus
Associaió Salut i Família
Association for Integration and Migration (SIMI)
Associaizione K_Alma
ASTI - Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés
Austrian Red Cross
CARE International
CARITAS - Luxembourg
Caritas Europa
CEFA Onlus
CEFIS
CELIM
Centar za integraciju mladih
Centro per la Formazione alla Solidarietà Internazionale
Cercle de Coopération
CESVI
CIAI
CICSENE
CIES
CIRÉ (coordination et initiatives pour réfugiés et étrangers)
CISV Onlus
Civic Committee for Human Rights from Croatia (CCHR)
CLAE
CODE - Coordination des ONG pour les droits de l’enfant
COMI
Comitato Collaborazione Medica CCM
Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)
Concord Italia
CONCORD Sweden
Consejo de la Juventud de España
Consorzio Ong Piemontesi COP
Coordinadora de ONG para el Desarrollo – España
Coordinamento Italiano NGO Internazionali
Cordaid
COSPE Onlus
59 CrEA Onlus  
60 CVM Comunità Volontari per il Mondo  
61 Danish Refugee Council  
62 Detention Action  
63 Diaconia - Center of Relief and Development  
64 DNK - German National Committee for International Youth Work  
65 Doras  
66 Dorcas Aid International  
67 Dutch Council for Refugees  
68 Dutch League for Human Rights (DLHR)  
69 EMERGENCY ONG – ONLUS  
70 EU-CORD  
71 EuroMed Rights  
72 European Association for the Defence of Human Rights (AEDH),  
73 European Evangelical Alliance  
74 European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation ENGSO Youth  
75 European Youth Forum  
    Federación de Asociaciones para la Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos  
    España  
77 FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)  
78 Finnish League for Human Rights (FLHR)  
79 Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission  
80 Finnish Refugee Council  
81 FMSI  
82 FOCSIV – Federazione Organismi Cristiani Servizio Internazionale Volontario  
83 Fondazione Fontana  
84 Fundación Atabal  
85 Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality and Diversity  
86 GVC  
87 Habitat for Humanity International, Europe, Middle East and Africa  
88 Handicap International  
89 Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR)  
90 Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights - Poland  
91 Human Rights Watch  
92 ICMC Europe  
93 International Aid Services  
94 International Association For Refugees  
95 International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims  
96 International Rescue Committee  
97 International Young Naturefriends - IYNF  
98 INTERSOS  
99 IPSIA  
100 Islamic Relief UK
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144 Save the Children
145 Secours Islamique France
146 SKOP - The National Platform of Maltese Development NGOs
147 SONIA per un Mondo Nuovo e Giusto
148 SPARK15
149 stichting LOS (National Support Organisation for the Undocumented)
150 Stichting Vluchteling
151 Swedish Refugee Advice Centre
152 Terra Nuova
153 Terre des Hommes
154 The Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU Kehys
155 The Migrants’ Rights Network
156 Trócaire
157 U.V.I.S.P.-ASSISI
158 United Protestant Church in Belgium
159 Welthungerhilfe
160 WeWorld
161 with the support of CONCORD Europe
162 World Vision