



To:

Her Excellency
 Andrea IKIĆ-BÖHM
 Ambassador of Austria to Greece

His Excellency
 Vesselin IVANOV
 Chargé d' Affaires of Bulgaria to
 Greece

His Excellency
 Luc LIEBAUT
 Ambassador of Belgium to Greece

His Excellency
 Christophe CHANTEPY
 Ambassador of France to Greece

His Excellency
 Jens Uwe PLÖTNER
 Ambassador of Germany to Greece

His Excellency
 Jens Michael Ole BRAAD
 Ambassador of Denmark to Greece

His Excellency
 Margus RAVA
 Ambassador of Estonia to Greece

Her Excellency
 Kate Smith
 Ambassador of the United Kingdom
 to Greece

Her Excellency
 Orla O' HANRAHAN
 Ambassador of Ireland to Greece

His Excellency
 Enrique VIGUERA RUBIO
 Ambassador of Spain to Greece

His Excellency
 Efisio Luigi MARRAS
 Ambassador of Italy to Greece

His Excellency
 Caspar Cornelis Johannes
 VELDKAMP
 Ambassador of the Kingdom of the
 Netherlands to Greece

His Excellency
 Aleksandar SUNKO
 Ambassador of the Republic of
 Croatia to Greece

His Excellency
 Kyriakos A. KENVEZOS
 Ambassador of the Republic of
 Cyprus to Greece

His Excellency
 Māris KLIŠĀNS
 Ambassador of Latvia to Greece

His Excellency
 Rolandas KAČINSKAS
 Ambassador of Lithuania to Greece

His Excellency
 Paul Alphons STEINMETZ
 Ambassador of Luxembourg to
 Greece

His Excellency
 Joseph CUSCHIERI
 Ambassador of Malta to Greece

His Excellency
 Erik Edgar HAUPT
 Ambassador of Hungary to Greece

Her Excellency
 Anna BARBARZAK
 Ambassador of the Republic of
 Poland to Greece

His Excellency
 Rui Alberto MANUPPELLA
 TERENO
 Ambassador of Portugal to Greece

His Excellency
 Lucian FĂTU
 Ambassador of Romania to Greece

Her Excellency
 Iveta HRICOVÁ
 Ambassador of the Slovakia to
 Greece

Her Excellency
 Anita PIPAN
 Ambassador of Slovenia to Greece

Her Excellency
 Charlotte SAMMELIN
 Ambassador of Sweden to Greece

His Excellency
 Jan BONDY
 Ambassador of the Czech Republic
 to Greece

His Excellency
 Juha Markus PYYKKÖ
 Ambassador of Finland to Greece

CC: Maarten Verwey, EU Coordinator, Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement

Athens, 21 November 2017

Dear Honorable Ambassador,

We, undersigned human rights and humanitarian nongovernmental organisations, are writing to express our deep concern at the deteriorating, and increasingly dangerous, conditions for thousands of women, men and children seeking asylum and trapped on the Aegean islands as winter sets in.

We urge you, as the permanent representative of your Government to Greece, to urgently support the end of the policy of confining people on the Greek islands if they arrived after the entry into force of the EU-Turkey Statement on 18 March 2016 (to which your country is a signatory). Further, we urge you to call on the EU and Greek Government to immediately transfer asylum seekers confined in the overcrowded facilities on the Greek islands to the mainland, and commit to supporting the Greek Government in every way necessary to sustainably meet the protection needs of all asylum seekers in its territory, including by supporting the expansion of adequate and safe accommodation and access to services on the mainland.

Since the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect, the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros have been transformed into places of indefinite confinement for asylum seekers. Thousands of women, men and children have been trapped on these islands in abysmal conditions and many lack access to adequate and timely asylum procedures and protection. Some who arrived on the islands in the early days of the EU-Turkey Statement have remained stuck there for 20 months.

EU and Greek officials have cited implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement as a justification for the policy. Reports of deteriorating conditions and dangerous overcrowding are far too often met with calls to the Greek Government to speed up summary returns to Turkey, with little regard for the integrity of the Greek asylum system or the basic rights of asylum seekers. This focus on returns and deterrence is not the solution but is rather the core problem as it leads to forcing asylum seekers to remain in conditions that violate their rights. Harming their wellbeing, health and dignity cannot be justified for political reasons.

According to government data of 20 November 2017, there are now 15,396 people on the islands, 12,554 of whom are being accommodated in facilities that have capacity to accommodate only 5,576. The recurring problems of overcrowding of facilities and difficulties in ensuring access to basic services can only be addressed by ending the policy of confining asylum seekers to the islands and providing them with adequate shelter and services on mainland Greece.

On Lesbos, more than 6,489 people live in overcrowded tents and containers in Moria, with little access to proper shelter, food, water, sanitation, health care, or protection. Dozens of people, including very young children, are crammed into tents with only a canvas cloth separating one family from another. The living conditions are particularly harsh for pregnant women to endure, and place them and their babies' health at risk. Summer camping tents, designed to accommodate not more than two people, are now holding families of up to seven. Accessing water, sanitation and food is particularly difficult for the many people with physical disabilities—for example, people using wheelchairs simply cannot reach these basic services. Single women in the hotspots report harassment by some of the men. And some asylum seekers have gone through their asylum interview without having had the requisite vulnerability assessment critical for determining both the asylum pathway available to them and the care they may require to prevent further

deterioration of their health. These conditions have a devastating impact on the long-term well-being of people trapped there.

A number of human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organisations, including Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and Human Rights Watch, have documented the impact of these conditions on the mental health of asylum seekers and migrants – including incidents of self-injury, suicide attempts, anxiety, aggression, and depression. Professionals who have interacted with the asylum seekers note that in many cases the psychological distress they experience has been factored and/or exacerbated by the policy of “containing” them on islands, which also impedes their access to adequate support and mental health care.

While Greek people continue to offer help, citizens and local authorities who before the EU-Turkey Statement showed unprecedented support and solidarity towards migrants and asylum seekers are now taking a harsher stand against them. As conditions deteriorate, actors on the islands have reported a rise in racist and xenophobic attitudes including violent attacks against asylum seekers by local populations, a direct consequence of the overcrowding, and new racist and extremist movements that spread fear and insecurity have emerged.

As we approach the third winter since large-scale arrivals on the islands began, and the second winter since the entry into force of the EU-Turkey Statement, it is evident that the Greek authorities cannot meet the basic needs and protect the rights of asylum seekers while they remain on the islands. Your government is now faced with the humanitarian imperative to call for an end to the containment policy and the immediate transfer of asylum seekers to the mainland, so that they can be provided with adequate accommodation, services to meet their needs, and access to fair and efficient asylum procedures.

We thank you for your attention, and remain available for any further discussion on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Advocates Abroad
Aitima
Amnesty International
ARSIS
CARE
Caritas Hellas
Danish Refugee Council
Greek Council for Refugees
Greek Forum of Refugees
Greek Helsinki Monitor
Solidarity Now
Terre des hommes

Help Refugees
Hellenic League for Human Rights
Human Rights Watch
International Rescue Committee
Jesuit Refugee Service
Legal Centre Lesbos
Medecins sans Frontieres
Norwegian Refugee Council
Oxfam
Praksis