Press Release

I was thinking of staying in Libya to work, but Libya is hell
3500 unaccompanied minors disembarked in Sicily in 2014.

Syracuse, Sicily, 24.09.2014 - Today, Terre des Hommes Italy and the Prefecture of Syracuse signed a partnership agreement to frame their collaboration to provide psycho-social support to unaccompanied minors disembarked in Sicily. 7800 children, of whom 3500 unaccompanied have been rescued in the Mediterranean Sea by the Mare Nostrum operation in 2014. While signing the agreement, the International Board of Terre des Hommes International Federation visited the harbour of Augusta/Syracuse and two reception centres for unaccompanied minors where Terre des Hommes is operating since 2013.

“After a long detention in a “connection house” in Libya, in the evening the smugglers took us to the beach, and they told us: today we will leave Libya to Italy. Everyone was celebrating because we will be free from slavery, anger, hunger, kidnapping, torturing, domestic work with no reward and robbery.” was telling Abdullhai (fictive name), a young 17-years-old migrant from Gambia who was rescued and disembarked in Sicily in May 2014. Today Abdullhai is still hosted in a temporary reception centres in the Syracuse province, waiting to be transferred in a permanent structure for unaccompanied minors.

Augusta-Sicily, 3 disembarks per week
In the harbour of Augusta (Syracuse, Sicily), 3 disembarks per week are operated by the Italian Navy ships, bringing in average eight hundreds migrants each time. This is the magnitude of the number of migrants rescued in the Mediterranean Sea by the Mare Nostrum operation started last October 2013 after so called « Lampedusa tragedy »

The harbour of Augusta is the main disembark point of the “Mare Nostrum migrants”, concentrating 50% of migrants arrivals in Sicily. The reception of such a high number of migrants in such a small province with very limited reception capacity and infrastructure is an unprecedented challenge as regard the Syracuse Province capacity to provide basic needs to migrants, especially unaccompanied minors. The Syracuse local authorities are therefore very much welcoming the work done by Terre des Hommes since last year to ensure a proper and professionalized psycho-social support to unaccompanied minors arriving in the territory.

“To face such complex situation, we urgently need an effective coordinated national system in Italy that ensures an adequate “distribution” of unaccompanied minors on the national territory, so that the stay of children in temporary centres turns being effectively temporary and short in time, and not permanent as it is the
situation now. We are aware that this has a real financial cost for Italian local authorities, this is why this must be addressed as a European issue and not exclusively a Sicilian or Italian one”, said Donatella Vergari, General Secretary of Terre des Hommes Italy.

From transit to permanent stays in reception centres
“The reception centres for unaccompanied minors in Syracuse province are meant to be temporary and transit structures, in reality unaccompanied minors turn remaining too long in such inadequate centres. Children wait indefinitely for long-term solutions, and this represents an additional trauma to the one they already suffered during their journey, said Lilian Pizzi, Terre des Hommes project coordinator in Syracuse. “Unaccompanied minors arriving here should be considered as a resource for Europe, and not only as an emergency migratory problem. This is why we must consider them as a social opportunity for Europe, as de facto, most of them end up staying in Europe. Therefore, they must be seen as future citizens who will establish in Europe, entitled to rights and protection since their arrivals”

TDH International Board on the spot
On 23rd September, all members of the International Board of Terre des Hommes International Federation visited both the harbour of Augusta and two “transit” reception centre for unaccompanied minors where Terre des Hommes is daily operating. “Terre des Hommes is not operating here to substitute the duties of public local and national authorities, but to complement it in providing adequate services and psycho-social support for unaccompanied minors. From this daily field work, Terre des Hommes also puts a spotlight on the phenomenon of children on the move and their rights to be protected, in Sicily as well as and in the whole Europe”, said Raffaele Salinari, Chair of Terre des Hommes International Federation”.

DATA
According to data published by UNHCR and IOM, by August 2014, between 1889 and 2200 migrants would have died in the Mediterranean Sea since January 2014; 1600 only in the last 3 months.

In total some 124.380 migrants have arrived to Europe by the Mediterranean Sea since January 2014, of whom 108.000 arrived to Italy; 14.000 are children and 8600 of them are unaccompanied. In comparison, 60.000 migrants reached Europe in 2013. Commenting such data, UNHCR is calling to a “common European responsibility and immediate concrete action at EU level” to provide an adequate response to this reality.

According to Syracuse local authorities, ninety disembarks have been operated in the harbour of Augusta since January 2014, representing an estimate of 36.000 migrants, of whom 3500 are unaccompanied minors.
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Press Dossier

Know more on FARO Project, a project to provide support for unaccompanied minors in Sicily

Know more on Destination Unknown Campaign to protect children on the move, by Terre des Hommes: www.destination-unknown.org

Know more on Terre des Hommes Italy: www.terredeshommes.it

Know more on Terre des Hommes International Federation: www.terredeshommes.org

Destination Unknown Campaign
With "Destination Unknown", a campaign to protect children on the move, Terre des Hommes protects children on the move, including unaccompanied minors, through field projects on the reception, protection, psychosocial and legal support of children in Italy (Sicily, FARO project), Malta (in association with KOPIN), Greece (in association with ARSIS) as well as in Central and South-East Europe.

Destination Unknown campaign was launched in 2012 to raise awareness about violation of the rights of unaccompanied minors - children on the move - who are fleeing war, poverty and violence. According to the most recent data, children on
the move who cross border are nearly 35 million worldwide (source: UN). The Campaign aims at enhancing adequate policy for effective protection and to provide concrete actions for these children, particularly those vulnerable to abuse, violence, exploitation and discrimination.