Press Release

Migrants crisis in Europe
Balkans, Hungary, Calais, Greece, Sicily... the ‘Lampedusa Tragedies’ now at internal borders
Terre des Hommes condemns the violence against migrant children

- Terre des Hommes denounces the closure of Hungary-Serbia border
- Europe must coordinate to support and protect children refugees in distress
- Immediate priorities: ‘humanitarian corridors’ from origin countries and in Europe, more aid in crisis regions

Terre des Hommes strongly condemns on-going operations to stop refugees crossing national borders to and within Europe. All European Governments, including non-EU members, backed by EU institutions, must implement an immediate common aid strategy for children and their families fleeing from war zones.

It is shameful for national governments to resort to closing of their borders especially through the edification of walls and barbed wire. The construction of the ‘Hungarian Wall’ is about to be terminated, another strong anchorage and shameful symbol of the ‘Fortress Europe’.

Protecting refugees is a matter of human dignity and international obligations. Refugees cannot be deprived of their fundamental human rights to international protection, water, food, shelter and medical treatment – as well as legal aid and psycho-social support, in particular for traumatized children on the move. To protect them, we are running Destination Unknown, an international campaign to protect children on the move. Through Destination Unknown, we are assisting over 200,000 migrant children on the ground worldwide, including at land or sea borders.

At the Greek-FYROM border, ARSIS, Association for the Social Support of Youth, a Greek organisation member of Destination Unknown Campaign, collected the testimony of migrant children who tried to cross Greek-FYROM border to reach other EU countries over the last few days.

One of them is A., 15 years old, coming from Afghanistan. “I tried to cross the Greek – FYROM border to head to Northern Europe. We were many people, around 2,000. We found ourselves in front of the Police who put us in line and took information from our cards. I tried to go by train but they say that the train is only for families. Busses are full and the taxi are very expensive. So, that’s why I’m still here and waiting... I know I can get cards and passport in Greece, but the
procedure is slow and I feel I am in prison. I want to go in a place where I can study, work and first of all I can dream.” In the last two months over 40,000 migrants passed the Greek-FYROM border.

“Our field operators in Italy have spoken with countless child refugees arriving in Sicily, reiterates Raffaele Salinari, Chair of Terre des Hommes International Federation. Children tell us about being forced to work for months to earn money for their journey across the Mediterranean Sea. They are under-nourished and traumatized. Many have experienced violence and abuse. If they cannot pay the full price for the crossing, they are locked in the hull and risk suffocation. The weakest died – like this Somali boy who was rescued from the sea just a couple of days ago but did not reach the shores of Sicily alive.” Only in Italy, from January to mid-August 2015; 7,357 unaccompanied migrant minors passed the borders.

State governments have international obligations to providing assistance and protection to children independently from immigration status. However, such direct assistance are increasingly carried out by local citizens volunteers who show incredible solidarity and engagement together with local associations and international NGOs. It is time for State governments to take their public responsibilities to give a concerted and long-term response in Europe.

Terre des Hommes reiterates its demand for the immediate opening of ‘humanitarian corridors’ for direct access of refugees to international protection and asylum from origin, respective neighbouring or transit countries. This is the only way to manage and plan the flow of refugees without leaving them at the mercy of smugglers and traffickers.

Since beginning of 2015, 265,000 refugees have crossed the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands more are crossing Turkey and the Balkans by land borders. Among them, increasing number of children, including unaccompanied (UN estimates; 50%). Without a safe, legal route into Europe, they are forced to put their lives in danger day after day.

In addition to a concerted, sustainable response to humanitarian urgent situations of migrants in Europe, Terre des Hommes call on European Governments and donors to increase their aid for Syria, Middle East and East Africa where most refugees are coming from and where many humanitarian aid projects are at risk due to a lack of funds.

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Destination Unknown Campaign

With Destination Unknown, a global campaign to protect children on the move, Terre des Hommes protects children on the move, including unaccompanied and refugee children, through field projects dedicated to the reception, protection, psychosocial and legal support of children.

In the Euro-Mediterranean region, Destination Unknown Campaign is active with direct access to migrant children throughout field operations in Sicily (Terre des Hommes), Malta (KOPIN), Greece (ARSIS), Cyprus (Hope for Children Cyprus), Central and South-East Europe, Lebanon (INSAN), Egypt (Terre des Hommes) and the Middle East.

Destination Unknown campaign was launched in 2012 to raise awareness about violation of the rights of children on the move – including unaccompanied minors-who are fleeing war, poverty and violence. According to the most recent data, children on the move who cross borders are nearly 35 million worldwide (source: UN).

The Campaign also advocates for adequate policy changes enabling effective protection measures and to provide concrete solutions for these children who left their home, particularly those vulnerable to abuse, violence, exploitation and discrimination.
Press Dossier

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

Know more on Destination Unknown Campaign to protect children on the move
www.destination-unknown.org

Know more on Terre des Hommes International Federation, a network of ten national organisations working for the rights of children and to promote equitable development without racial, religious, political, cultural or gender-based discrimination.
www.terredeshommes.org