

Open Letter

To: Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament
Members of the European Parliament on the AFET Committee
Members of the European Parliament on the LIBE Committee
Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council
Donald Tusk, President-elect of the European Council
Angelino Alfano, Italian Minister of the Interior, Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union
Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission
Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship
Robert Visser, Executive Director, European Asylum Support Office

CC: Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission
Gil Arias, Executive Director a.i., Frontex

Re: 9 December 2014: EU Member States must increase pledges to resettle and admit more refugees fleeing Syria

Dear Madam, Dear Sir,

In less than a month from now, the European Union and its Member States have been invited to gather with their international counterparts for a ministerial-level pledging conference on resettlement and other forms of admission for Syrian refugees. The war in Syria has caused over 3 million people to flee from conflict and persecution. All EU Member States must seize this opportunity to provide safe and legal means of entry so that more people can rebuild their lives in Europe in safety and dignity. The undersigned organisations, Amnesty International, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), International Rescue Committee, Jesuit Refugee Service Europe, Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children are calling on you to urge Member States to make meaningful pledges at this conference to resettle and admit more refugees who have fled Syria.

In almost four years of the conflict in Syria, some States have made important [contributions](#) to addressing part of the resettlement needs. Indeed, UNHCR's first benchmark of 30,000 places for resettlement and other forms of admission in 2013 and 2014 has been met and surpassed. Since 2013, EU Member States have committed over 33,000 places for resettling or admitting refugees from Syria. Germany alone has made 28,500 places available, with twelve other Member States together contributing under 5,000 places. UNHCR has called for an additional 100,000 places to be committed for 2015 and 2016. However, even if this target was met, the contribution would still be insufficient with regard to the actual resettlement needs in the region. As the countries neighbouring Syria have received more than 3 million Syrian refugees, they feel increasingly unable to maintain the generous hospitality they have offered since the conflict began.

Europe can and must do more. There are still many Member States that have not yet responded to the call to help refugees who have fled Syria and have not offered a significant number of resettlement places or additional places for humanitarian admission, private sponsorships, family reunification, humanitarian visas or other instruments.

UNHCR's upcoming pledging conference on 9 December 2014 in Geneva gives States a new opportunity to act together and offer additional places for refugees fleeing the conflict. The European Union and the EU Member States must seize this opportunity to express greater international solidarity and significantly increase their role in providing protection for refugees, in particular for the most vulnerable among them. NGOs are hereby calling on EU States to offer a substantial number of new and additional resettlement places, through resettlement and other forms of admission, either in the framework of national quotas or by means of ad hoc commitments. Such places should be provided so that the most vulnerable that UNHCR has identified can benefit, including women and girls at risk, survivors of violence or torture, refugees with medical needs or disabilities, refugees at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, vulnerable older refugees, and refugees in need of family reunification. In resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes, priority should also be given to children and adolescents, with those most at risk resettled first

as identified in refugee law. In doing so, specific criteria should be used in order to uphold the best interest of each individual child.

NGOs and other civil society actors across Europe stand ready to work with national governments to provide significant practical support to those refugees arriving in Europe, and particularly with respect to assistance upon arrival, their initial settling in period, and in their integration into local communities. Furthermore, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has continued throughout the crisis to operate resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes from Syria and its neighbourhood, including pre-departure arrangements, health assessments, cultural orientation and travel assistance for the Syrian refugees. IOM supports the call for increased legal and safe ways to reach Europe and stands ready to provide further support to EU member states with setting up and implementing resettlement and related humanitarian admission, family reunification or other programmes for Syrian refugees.

Put simply, resettlement and other forms of admission save lives. Without these lifelines, more refugees will continue to live in constant fear, finding it more and more difficult to access safe and secure livelihoods or basic services such as education, health and housing. In such desperate conditions, many see no other option than to risk their lives to reach Europe by land or by sea. Offering resettlement and other forms of admission to refugees can mean the difference between life and death; between thriving or just surviving. The EU needs to be part of the solution for Syria's refugees and the pledging conference provides them with the opportunity to do just that. The refugees who are desperate for options to rebuild their lives are counting on you to encourage Member States to assume their responsibilities.

Yours sincerely,

Signing Organisations:

