

## **Urgent Call from Moria Camp for Help in Corona Times**

- To the European Union
- To the Governments of European Countries
- The European Public

*Moria Camp, Lesvos April 16<sup>th</sup> 2020*

We are addressing you from Moria Camp in Lesvos and ask for your help and support. Here in Lesvos almost 24.000 refugees currently live in highly inhuman conditions, with no services, only several hours of water per day and under deplorable hygienic conditions. We see, that now, after a long time, there is an ongoing discussion in the European public about us, about the circumstances we are living in.

We would like to thank for all the solidarity, which we got in the last months and days from the European civil society, from all the people, who are not willing to abandon us in these times of the corona-crisis in their countries. We like to thank to all the politicians, communities, towns all over Europe, who declared, they like to receive refugees like us in their neighbourhoods. This give us hope and confidence, that the long and hard way we all have behind us, when we were forced to leave our home countries, was not in vain. We all came to Europe, because we want to live like human beings and because we could not stand the violence, the wars and the persecution we all faced. We were coming, because our children deserve a better future, where they can live in safety, have access to health services, go to school and have the opportunity to make the most of their lives by using their abilities.

Now we are in a double crisis. We are hostages of circumstances, we are not responsible for. At first the general living conditions in the Moria camp, which are really horrible and which are degrading us day by day. But now we face the problem of the pandemic danger, which we cannot stand alone. We began to organize our life in misery, we try to protect our dignity, but we cannot fight against a virus without minimal hygienic standards and possibilities to protect us.

Any advise how to avoid the spread of Corona even sound illusionary to us: How should we keep distance, if thousand have to wait for food every day, how to wash our hands, if no water is available? How can sick persons isolate if there is no place for that?

In the beginning of the crisis, we felt left abandoned and were totally unprepared. We took some measures to self-organize with the support from some, mainly local Greek NGOs to raise awareness and prepare for the worse. During the last weeks, we managed a lot of small steps, cleaned the camp, set up some hand washing stations, printed posters and leaflets and did other activities. While Corona spread in Greece and here in Lesvos, we expected the worst, because this virus in the camp would be like a death sentence for old, sick and other vulnerable individuals.

For the first time, we are able to breath in a bit of relief, since no new cases were reported on the island for more than two weeks. But this does not mean the danger vanishes. In contrary, Moria camp will stay vulnerable for many more months. But for us, the first phase of trying to keep the virus away by all means is over and now we are trying to prepare for the next period of time.

In March here in Moria, refugees created several groups like the Moria Corona Awareness Team (MCAT) and Moria White Helmets. We worked very closely together with Greek and International NGOs as well as the local authorities.

We also followed the demands and campaigns of the local Greek government for evacuation and call by ourselves to dissolve these camps in Lesvos, Chios, Samos and other islands as soon as possible. But we do see that this will not happen soon.

Therefore, we suggest a two-folded strategy for the future. We urge Europe to evacuate

the old, sick and vulnerable immediately because there is no protection for them here. This has to include unaccompanied or sick children with their families.

In the meanwhile, many important steps can be taken to help the ones who will remain.

The steps to address these issues are:

- water (sewage/toilets, showers, and taps)

- trash

- isolation

- food supply/food line

- hygiene/disinfection

- fire protection

- security

- awareness/education

This can and should be done with support of the European Union and EU governments, with the understanding that this is not a long-term solution. These camps violate the laws of international human rights and refugee rights. There should be a consensus among the European governments that these camps need to be dissolved as soon as possible, which realistically means after this Coronavirus pandemic. We, the refugees of Moria camp, under the guidance of MCAT and Moria White Helmets offer our support and cooperation to any entity ready to assist in this endeavor on a temporary and provisional level. This strategy also coincides with the desires of the Greek government who have long been requesting the EU's assistance in taking in refugees, finding a long-term solution and relieving the pressure on the island and its people.

We know how much the Greek citizens on these islands have suffered during the last years and we also call on Europe to assist them in these difficult times. They also ask since a long for a sustainable solution instead of being left alone with this crisis.

As we see it, the most plausible solution would be that the governments of the EU make cooperative contracts with the Greek government to provide aid, backing and technical

support in order to fix what is fixable while the Coronavirus crisis is ongoing. At the same time, it is also important to work towards evacuating as many people as possible. This being of the minors, the elderly and those with health conditions, and then working towards a long-term solution for evacuating the island and closing the camps once the crisis has passed. We welcome very much the first steps taken by the Greek Government now to get some of these vulnerable people out of the camps.

By addressing the immediate structural needs in Moria camp on a short-term, temporary basis, time will be bought to find a more substantial solution for those currently residing in Moria, paving the way for Moria and other hot spots to be permanently closed.

We need help to help ourselves. We are willing to do whatever we can do to protect all of us from the ongoing danger of the Coronavirus. We are in Europe and we need Europe to survive!



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