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Letter | 15.11.2021

Supporting Humanitarian Workers at the EU's External Border

A joint open letter

On 21st August 2018, Greek Police arrested humanitarian workers Seán Binder, Sarah Mardini and Nassos Karakitsos along with over 20 others. They were subsequently taken to Mytilene police station, questioned, and detained on orders of the Magistrate of Mytilene and held in pre-trial detention for over 100 days, whereupon they were released on bail.

On 17th August 2021, almost three years later, the Misdemeanours' Prosecutor of Mytilene, submitted a first set of indictments with a second set of indictments still expected to follow. The charges levelled against these humanitarian workers include espionage, linked to their use of the common encrypted messaging app Whatsapp, facilitating the entry of third country citizens seeking refugee status in the EU and, the formation and membership of a criminal organisation. Séan, Sarah, Nassos, are facing up to 25 years in prison.

When arrested, Seán, Sarah, Nassos and others were part of the Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI), a Greek non-profit humanitarian organisation that was running a search and rescue programme in Lesvos, as well as a medical clinic offering primary care in the Moria refugee camp. The organisation was well known, was closely cooperating with the relevant Greek Authorities and had the required licenses and accreditations under Greek law to conduct search and rescue operations and operate inside the Moria refugee camp.

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, with utmost respect for the integrity and impartiality of the Greek judicial system, strongly believe that humanitarian workers such as Seán, Sarah, Nassos and their colleagues do not pose a threat to society and should not be treated as criminals.

Recalling European Parliament resolution 2018/2769(RSP) of 5 July 2018 on guidelines for Member States to prevent the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance, we are committed more than ever to a European reception policy that is rooted in principles of humanity and solidarity. We join our voices to those of their families, of other humanitarian NGOs, and of all the people around Europe who support efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need or in distress at sea, as required under International Law.

We express our grave concern about the charges that have been filed against Seán, Sarah, Nassos

and others. We call for a thorough review and change to Member State policies that have led to the criminalisation of humanitarian workers such as Seán, Sarah, and Nassos, and to ensure the protection of humanitarian assistance at the EU's external borders under national and European laws.

Sincerely,

Grace O'Sullivan (Greens/EFA)
Alice Bah Kuhnke (Greens/EFA)
Alviina Alametsä (Greens/EFA)
Anna Cavazzini (Greens/EFA)
Anna Deparnay-Grünenberg (Greens/EFA)
Anne-Sophie Pelletier (The Left)
Barry Andrews (Renew Europe)
Benoît Biteau (Greens/EFA)
Bettina Vollath (S&D)
Billy Kelleher (Renew Europe)
Birgit Sippel (S&D)
Caroline Roose (Greens/EFA)
Chris McManus (The Left)
Ciarán Cuffe (Greens/EFA)
Clare Daly (The Left)
Claude Gruffat (Greens/EFA)
Cornelia Ernst (The Left)
Damian Boeselager (Greens/EFA)
Damien Carême (Greens/EFA)
Delara Burkhardt (S&D)
Diana Riba I Giner (Greens/EFA)
Dietmar Köster (S&D)
Domènec Ruiz Devesa (S&D)
Eleonora Evi (Greens/EFA)
Erik Marquardt (Greens/EFA)
Ernest Urtasun (Greens/EFA)
Fabio Massimo Castaldo (Non-attached)
François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA)
Guy Verhofstadt (Renew Europe)
Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield (Greens/EFA)
Hannah Neumann (Greens/EFA)
Helmut Scholz (The Left)
Hilde Vautmans (Renew Europe)
Ignazio Corrao (Greens/EFA)
Irena Joveva (Renew Europe)
Isabel Carvalhais (S&D)
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Salima Yenbou (Greens/EFA)
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Seán Kelly (EPP)
Sira Rego (The Left)
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Contact person



Nina Walch

Rights and Democracy Campaigner

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