

# Migration disputes should not be solved by putting people's lives at risk

## Joint Italian and Maltese NGO Statement on incidents relating to people rescued at sea

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Whilst we welcome the recent developments in relation to the disembarkation of rescued people on board the Alexander Maersk cargo and the ongoing coordination between the Governments of Italy, Malta, France and Spain, we urge all actors involved to immediately secure the disembarkation of the over 230 rescued people, among which children, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable individuals, currently aboard the Mission Lifeline rescue ship. Whilst we appreciate the need to clarify legal responsibilities, we emphasise that the protection of life and human dignity should remain the topmost priority.

In order to preserve the integrity of the maritime rule whereby all persons in distress are to be rescued, it is imperative that coastal states coordinate their efforts towards ensuring a prompt disembarkation at a place of safety. This is a clear obligation under international law.

We are keen to clarify that NGOs rescuing persons in distress are not violating international norms, but rely on States to fulfil their obligations by indicating a safe port for prompt disembarkation of all rescued persons. We also remind the authorities concerned that disembarkation in unsafe places, such as Libya, would violate international law and is therefore not a valid option. Thus, we express our concern with the announcement made by both the Italian and Maltese authorities on the intention of sanctioning the captain and crew of the Mission Lifeline rescue ship.

As Italian and Maltese civil society organisations, we reiterate that political disputes over migration responsibilities cannot be resolved by violating international law and placing people's lives and wellbeing at risk. Humanitarian and human rights obligations should always prevail over political considerations.

We therefore urge the forthcoming European Council meeting to urgently identify and implement much needed solutions to the situation in the Mediterranean, inspired by the principle of European solidarity and fully in line with the obligations related to the protection of human rights.

*Statement issued by:*

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**27 June 2018**