

To: Heads of State and Government

**Letter to the Extraordinary European Council, 23 April 2015**

**The tragedy that took place off the Libyan coast last Saturday, where up to 900 people lost their lives, has caused shock in Europe. These mass deaths are yet another set-back to the European project based on solidarity and defense of the dignity of every human being. The European Union and its Member States must change their migration policies.**

The worst maritime disaster in Mediterranean since the Second World War casts a spotlight of guilt not only on the unscrupulous traffickers that put these people in that boat but also on the EU. Sadly, this is not the first human tragedy of this kind and will not be the last in the near future.

We welcome the fact that the EU Member states have decided to act rapidly now. However, the [Ten-point action plan](#) presented by the joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council on 20 April is still far from providing an effective solution.

**A European search and rescue operation at EU external borders must become a priority** before everything else. Apart from a small effort in doubling the resources to the EU Frontex agency, with no specific search and rescue mandate, the EU Member states again focus mainly on repressive measures.

The war against smugglers or fingerprinting of all migrants are not measures to save more lives, neither are they addressing what the EU can and must fix: **to open safe and legal channels for those seeking protection when fleeing war and persecution and legal channels for labour migration.**

We remind European leaders that their former declarations on “[concrete actions to prevent loss of life](#)” (04.12.2013) have not resulted in a smaller death toll in the Mediterranean. This is why it is the duty of all EU countries to show immediate and long-term actions rather than agreeing on declarations.

We call on EU-leaders at the extraordinary meeting of the EU Council this Thursday to show clear commitment in saving lives in the Mediterranean and on all EU-borders. Europe must replace the Triton operation with a fully-fledged search and rescue operation that would follow the good results of the Italian “Mare Nostrum” operation that was put down in the end of 2014.

Warm regards,



Jorge Nuño Mayer,  
Secretary General  
Caritas Europa



Michel Roy,  
Secretary General  
Caritas Internationalis

***“There needs to be a united response to the question of migration. We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery!”*** – Pope Francis, European Parliament, 25 November 2014.