

## **SOS MEDITERRANEE saves over 900 lives in nine rescue operations within less than 24 hours. Resources in the Mediterranean are not sufficient.**

**In the night from Saturday to Sunday, the European rescue organisation SOS MEDITERRANEE saved over 900 refugees from nine wooden boats and rubber dinghies – more than ever before.** With the support of rescue organisations Life Boat and Sea Watch, everyone could be brought to safety aboard the Aquarius. According to first estimates, there are around 200 unaccompanied minors amongst the rescued.

Klaus Merkle, rescue coordinator aboard the Aquarius noted: “the operation was extremely challenging for the entire rescue team. Nine boats, amongst them overcrowded wooden and rubber boats. Nearly 1,000 people in just a few hours! We have never saved that many people in such little time. This is a new record! The fact that there weren’t any casualties can be attributed to the professionalism of our team and the collaboration with other civil rescue operations. We are happy that we were able to bring all rescued safely on board.”

SOS MEDITERRANEE is the only civil rescue ship operating continuously also over these winter months. Since the start of 2017, the team aboard the Aquarius has rescued over 3,000 people. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that since 2002 at least 46,000 people have drowned, attempting to cross the Mediterranean. This year 525 people have already lost their lives. Nonetheless, there is no European-wide rescue programme. Due to the lack of response to this humanitarian catastrophe at the EU level, it is civil rescue organisations that have taken over this task. It is for this reason that SOS MEDITERRANEE was established in 2015 after the Italian search and rescue operation ‘Mare Nostrum’ was suspended. For the past year, SOS MEDITERRANEE has witnessed the despair of people fleeing across the Mediterranean, “We were on the boat for 12 hours, it was completely dark and silent. I was crying because I was sure I would die”, says Sébastien, who is just one of the people that was rescued this past weekend. People put their lives at risk, trying to cross the Mediterranean to escape armed conflict, hunger and persecution. Often people are also escaping human traffickers, having been detained in inhuman conditions in Libya. SOS MEDITERRANEE collects the stories of refugees, to educate the European public of the reasons and conditions of their flight: <http://sosmediterranee.org/testimonies/>.

Sophie Beau, founder and manager of SOS MEDITERRANEE France explains: “to let those die, who are coming to us in hope of safety and protection, is in violation of our common European values and against humanity. We cannot just stand by. For this reason we are calling on European States, organisations and agencies to guarantee the universal right to life and physical integrity of everyone, no matter what challenges this may pose to our societies. It is imperative to re-establish state-led rescue operations. As long as this is not the case, we will continue our efforts in the Mediterranean.”

**Further release requested. Photo Credits:** Patrick Bar / SOS MEDITERRANEE.

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*SOS MEDITERRANEE ist eine europäische Organisation zur Rettung Schiffbrüchiger im Mittelmeer. Sie hat sich 2015 gegründet und ist seit Februar 2016 in Kooperation mit Ärzten ohne Grenzen mit dem Rettungsschiff Aquarius im Mittelmeer im Einsatz. Innerhalb eines Jahres ist SOS MEDITERRANEE über 14.000 Menschen zur Hilfe gekommen.*