

## **SOS MEDITERRANEE receives the UNESCO-Peace Prize while in the Mediterranean the Aquarius welcomes 1.032 people onboard**



**“Save, protect, testify – until the Mediterranean will be a peaceful place.”**

Yesterday, Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> of June, SOS MEDITERRANEE was awarded the Houphouët Boigny-Peace Prize together with the former mayor of Lampedusa, Giusi Nicolini. The award ceremony was held at the UNESCO Headquarter in Paris. SOS MEDITERRANEE is honored by this award that acknowledges the organization’s live-saving engagement at sea and at land. SOS MEDITERRANEE moreover dedicates the price to all those who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean during the last years.

During the 16 months that SOS MEDITERRANEE is now operating the rescue vessel Aquarius alongside Doctors Without Borders, the Aquarius teams assisted more than 20.5000 people onboard. The growing number of rescue operations carried out in the Central Mediterranean these days clearly demonstrate the need for private actors to save lives. However, they cannot be left alone with the responsibility and obligation to rescue people in distress at sea.

The number of people who are risking their lives while crossing the Mediterranean, increases with good weather conditions during summer time. According to AFP, over 8.000 people were rescued in past three days. While yesterday SOS MEDITERRANEE received the UNESCO Peace Prize, the Aquarius crew welcomed 1.032 people during a 12-hours-operation - more people than ever before. In the early morning hours, 741 refugees and migrants were transferred from an offshore supply vessel that has rescued them one day earlier. Several hundred people were rescued in two following operations. At the end of the day the number of people on board exceeded 1000. The youngest among them were born only a week ago: twins from Nigeria. Further, 230 unaccompanied minors and 11 pregnant women arrived on board.

*SOS MEDITERRANEE is a European organization for the rescue of people in distress at sea. It was founded in 2015 and launched its rescue operations in February 2016. Together with its medical partner Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the organization has assisted more than 19.000 people within its first year of rescue activities.*

*Past laureates of the Prize have included personalities such as French President François Hollande, Nelson Mandela and Frederik W. De Klerk; Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat; King Juan Carlos of Spain and former U.S.A. President, Jimmy Carter.*



*"Today's operations went well, which to a huge extent was due to the good weather conditions that helped avoiding any incident during the rescues. In particular, the second rubber boat was of very low quality and could have easily deflated during the rescue operations. In bad weather conditions this could have ended up in a disaster,"* commented Hauke Mack, search and rescue coordinator aboard the Aquarius.

Many of the people taken onboard are visibly marked by the violence they had previously experienced in Libya. *"I wouldn't even send my worst enemy to Libya. Even though we survived, many of us have already died inside,"* the Aquarius team was told by a man from Guinea Conakry.

Facing the deteriorating situation in the Mediterranean, SOS MEDITERRANEE repeatedly calls on the European Union to deploy adequate maritime search- and rescue means.

*"A true European Search and Rescue fleet has to be put in place – in accordance with and in full respect of international law and the law of the sea,"* said Sophie Beau, Vice-President of SOS MEDITERRANEE International and founder of SOS MEDITERRANEE France during her speech at the UNESCO award ceremony in Paris. She added: *"This is our responsibility: to protect the people who are fleeing. It is immoral, cynical and contradicts our legal principles to send these people back to Libya, where they have been persecuted. Our states have the obligation to protect together the people whose lives are in danger."*

SOS MEDITERRANEE demands for a migration policy that is based on human dignity, responsibility and respect for every human life, and which is in accordance with European values.

For immediate release

Press contact: Jana Ciernioch, SOS MEDITERRANEE Deutschland e.V.

[j.ciernioch@sosmediterranee.org](mailto:j.ciernioch@sosmediterranee.org)

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