

-PRESS RELEASE-

**SOS MEDITERRANEE ready to sign the Code of Conduct for NGOs
if main concerns are taken into consideration**

Today, Monday July 31st, a third meeting was held in the Ministry of Interior in Rome to discuss the draft Code of Conduct for humanitarian organizations conducting search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean. Representatives of the Italian Government and NGOs conducting search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean attended the meeting.

Unable to attend this meeting for logistical reasons, Sophie Beau Vice-President of SOS MEDITERRANEE sent a letter to the minister of the Interior, Marco Minniti, to explain why SOS MEDITERRANEE could not sign the current version of the Code of Conduct today.

On behalf of SOS MEDITERRANEE she acknowledged *“the concerns of Italy being isolated on the frontline, without adequate and sufficient support from the European States”* and also said that *“SOS MEDITERRANEE would be ready to sign the Code of Conduct if its main concerns were taken into consideration in the amendments”*.

Assured by the previous meetings that both parties – the Italian Government and the NGOs - are *“close to a mutual agreement”*, SOS MEDITERRANEE suggested in the letter three key amendments that would **allow SOS MEDITERRANEE to sign the Code of Conduct proposed by the Italian Government while at the same time being able to continue its vital mission at sea in full efficiency and safety** for both the rescue teams and the refugees.

In order to sign the Code of Conduct, SOS MEDITERRANEE suggests to:

- Specify the regulations for technical suitability of rescue vessels. The current wording is unclear and could lead to different interpretations.

- Clarify that NGO vessels will also in the future be able to transfer rescued people to other vessels under the coordination of the Italian MRCC, such as Coast Guard, merchant and NGO vessels. The current draft Code of Conduct mentions a restriction of those transfers. Due to a current lack of state assets in the Central Mediterranean, however, transfers are a necessary operational means to make rescue activities more efficient. Thereby, we can guarantee that rescued individuals are brought to a harbour of safety, while other vessels can stay in the area to save lives. In the last months this has allowed NGOs to save thousands of lives. **SOS**

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 20.000 people within its first year of rescue activities.

MEDITERRANEE fully agrees on the fact that the Italian MRCC should be in charge of coordinating these operations, according to maritime international regulations.

- Clarify the conditions for allowing judicial police officers on board the humanitarian rescue vessels. **SOS MEDITERRANEE requests that these should not be permanently present on board, that they do not wear arms as this would stand in sharp contrast with the humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence. Moreover, SOS MEDITERRANEE requests that judicial police officers do not interfere with the humanitarian mission and principles** of SOS MEDITERRANEE. We consider it crucial to provide a full recuperation period of minimum 24 hours after the rescue to all rescued persons on board, to allow them to get the urgent care they need.

SOS MEDITERRANEE is confident that the Italian Ministry of Interior together with the humanitarian organizations saving lives at sea, will come to a final conclusion, always with the priority to save lives in the most efficient way, in full respect of international maritime and humanitarian law.

SOS MEDITERRANEE is available for more information.

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