

SOS MEDITERRANEE signs amended version of the Code of Conduct during meeting in Rome

Today, Friday August 11th, European humanitarian organization SOS MEDITERRANEE met with Mario Morcone, Head of Civil Liberties and Immigration at the Ministry of Interior in Rome. The meeting was set to continue the discussion on the Code of Conduct for humanitarian organizations saving lives in the Central Mediterranean.

The meeting was held in a spirit of openness and constructive dialogue.

Acknowledging the life-saving work of NGOs and SOS MEDITERRANEE's openness to discussion, the Italian Ministry of Interior agreed to include the points raised by Sophie Beau on behalf of the SOS MEDITERRANEE international network during the meeting, by adding them to the current Code of Conduct in the form of an addendum. As a result, SOS MEDITERRANEE signed the Code of Conduct this morning.

The Code of Conduct now acknowledges in written form that:

- The Code of Conduct is not legally binding and existing national and international laws and regulations prevail.
- The Code of Conduct does not mention the carrying of any form of weapon. Therefore, SOS MEDITERRANEE does not commit itself to receive any armed persons aboard its ship, without prejudice of a mandate that could be issued in the frame of national or international law.
- Police officers received aboard the rescue vessels commit not to interfere with the humanitarian mission of saving and protecting lives.
- The Code of Conduct does not restrict transfers of survivors to other vessels, if coordinated by the MRCC Rome.

In the meeting, co-founder and Vice-President of SOS MEDITERRANEE International Sophie Beau, shared the "*concerns of Italy, which is left alone in responding to the humanitarian tragedy unfolding at Europe's doorsteps*" but also stressed that "*a Code of Conduct for NGOs cannot be the response to the deaths at sea*".

"We highly appreciate the efforts of the Italian Ministry of Interior to discuss and accept our amendments in order to specify and improve the Code of Conduct for NGOs. We are pleased that priority is being given to the most important thing: saving lives at sea", commented Sophie Beau at the end of the meeting.

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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.

ANNEX: ADDENDUM

- It is understood that this Code of Conduct does not imply a restriction on the practice of transferring survivors to other vessels and that these transshipments will continue to be carried out under the exclusive coordination of the MRCC Rome and under the existing international maritime law, as well as other applicable legal standards.
- It is understood, as specified in the mentioned Code of Conduct, that police officers shall not interfere with the existing regulations (UNCLOS) *"and other applicable rules of international law, ... the competences of the shipmaster and ... the different mandates and competences of the legal entities involved as provided under national and international law."*
- As specified in the Code of Conduct, it is understood that the presence of judicial police officers on board which may at times be considered *"possibly and strictly necessary, upon request by the Italian authorities"*, shall not interfere with the humanitarian activity carried out on the NGO vessels, and in particular shall not interfere with the care and protection of the rescued persons. It is agreed that a full recuperation period of a minimum of 24 hours for all rescued persons must be respected.
- It is understood and acknowledged that SOS MEDITERRANEE already receives Italian judicial police officers on board whenever the Aquarius is in port in Italy and that the NGO commits itself to continuing this procedure and to cooperate with the Italian authorities in tackling human trafficking.
- It is understood that the Code of Conduct does not mention the carrying of any form of weapon. Therefore, SOS MEDITERRANEE does not commit itself to receive any armed persons aboard its ship, without prejudice of a mandate that could be issued in the frame of national and international law.

It is understood that the signing of this Code of Conduct by the NGO SOS MEDITERRANEE is only possible after clarification and inclusion of these written addendums.

SOS MEDITERRANEE International network

Sophie Beau