

Conference Statement "Walled World Europe"

Many thousands of refugees and migrants die on their journey to a better life in Europe. Since 1988 14,000 casualties have been documented.¹ Many die without ever to be found again. This drama takes place daily at the external borders of Europe: on the Mediterranean Sea and the in the Sahara. Because of strict border controls and immigration rules, migrants choose the most dangerous routes and means to arrive in Europe. Despite the high number of people who drown or die from exhaustion, there is at present no European body accountable for these victims. On June 6, 2011 Kerk in Actie and Justitia et Pax Netherlands organized the conference "Walled World Europe" in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The participants in this conference came to the following closing statement:

We, the signatories of this petition,

Underscore the entitlement of everyone to all rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the other UN-human rights declarations, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (UDHR, art. 2);

Emphasize that all men are free and equal in dignity, that everyone has the right to life, the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family (UDHR art. 1, 3, 25).

Are very concerned about the large numbers of refugees that die at the external borders of Europe, among whom there are many women and children,

Consider

- that there is a direct link between strengthened European border control and the increased number of casualties among refugees and migrants. The border patrols make it more difficult for refugees and migrants to reach Europe and many of them are therefore forced to choose dangerous routes²;
- that the European Union and its member states provide practical and financial assistance to border countries that prevent refugees and migrants from entering Europe, while they are aware of the fact that fundamental rights of migrants in these countries are violated³;
- that there is no official European body which is accountable for these victims of the European policy on immigration restrictions and border controls. Nor is any European body responsible or accountable for preventing new casualties among refugees and migrants;
- that there is a significant lack of awareness of the above mentioned problems at the borders of Europe, among the general public, politicians and civil society in Europe.

¹ <http://owni.eu>

² Thomas Spijkerboer, The Human Costs of Border Control. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 9(2007), 147-161

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/opinion/19lucht.html?_r=1n

Are of the opinion

- that it is the responsibility of both the European Union and of any national European government to prevent casualties as a result of immigration laws and border controls. Individual memberstates are responsible for a humane and fair treatment of all refugees and migrants arriving on their shores. The European Union is responsible for preventing casualties among migrants in the Mediterranean and the Sahara. By stopping boats of migrants in international waters, by being negligent in rescuing sinking ships and by subsidizing North African countries that transport refugees and migrants without essential food to the Sahara, the European Union contributes at this moment to the high number of casualties among refugees and migrants.
- that the European border controls, carried out by Frontex, do not sufficiently take into account the rights of individuals, including legitimate asylum seekers⁴;
- that the treatment of refugees and migrants in the southern European states is below acceptable standards⁵ and that northern European countries should do more to assist their southern neighbors in addressing this issue as well;
- that the migration issue should be addressed in a broader economic and (geo)political context. EU policies towards prevention of migrants must be directed by actively striving for economic development, protection of human rights and good governance in countries outside the EU

Recommend to the Dutch government and the governments of other EU memberstates

- to take responsibility in proposing a European policy on the protection of (boat) refugees.
- to create more opportunities for legal migration to prevent people from using illegal methods.

Recommend to the European Commission:

- to investigate the exact number of people who die at the European borders and to publish these figures;
- to provide transparency about the methods and results of Frontex and the national border controls, by setting up regular monitoring by an independent organization;
- to develop a plan to ensure that much less refugees die at the frontiers of Europe each year;
- to establish or designate a European body which is explicitly committed to reducing the number of these victims and which may be held responsible or publicly accountable for this purpose;
- to direct economic and foreign policies of the EU towards improved conditions and increased prosperity and freedom in countries outside Europe in such a way that will reduce the need to migrate.

Recommend European non-governmental organizations to consistently address the fate of refugees and migrants in their projects and advocacy trajectories.

⁴ http://www.ecre.org/files/ECRE_BRC%20Response%20to%20HoL%20Frontex%20Inquiry%20Sept07.pdf

⁵ <http://www.amnesty.eu/static/documents/2010/GreeceDublinIIReport.pdf>