



Press release by United4Rescue and Sea-Watch

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EU must take responsibility: Sea-Watch 4 and Etienne immediately need a port of safety

After the medical evacuation of a teenager with severe fuel burns by the Italian Coast Guard yesterday, Wednesday, 201 rescued people are still waiting aboard 'Sea-Watch 4 powered by United4Rescue' for the assignment of a port of safety. Meanwhile, off Malta, the merchant ship Etienne has been denied permission to disembark 27 people rescued from sea distress for 22 days – the longest stand-off in history.

Between August 22 and 24, Sea-Watch 4 was able to rescue three boats within 48 hours from distress, with a total of 202 people on board. After yesterday's medical evacuation of a teenager with severe fuel burns, the remaining 201 rescued people on board the Sea-Watch 4 are waiting for an assigned port of safety, that was already requested on August 23rd in Malta and Italy, the safe states geographically closest to the rescue. Malta has already rejected the Sea-Watch 4 request.

Onboard, the rescued people receive medical care from the MSF team. *"Men, women and children are abandoned to drift for hours or even days without assistance, if they are rescued at all"* - says Barbara Deck, MSF Medical Project Coordinator. *"Our medical team has so far conducted 150 consultations on deck and in the clinic on board Sea-Watch 4. Along with seasickness and dehydration, we have treated patients for recent injuries consistent with reports of abuse and torture in Libya, as well as trauma and burns sustained trying to cross the Mediterranean. And these are only the physical wounds; the wounds we can see. Holding those rescued at sea in a state of protracted limbo puts untold psychological strain on already vulnerable people. It is unnecessary and inhumane. They have endured enough."*

"After each mission, the question arises again for the civilian sea rescuers as to what is to become of those rescued. The rescue ships sometimes wait for weeks for a port of safety. The fact is: According to international maritime law and the UN Convention on Human Rights, Libya is still not a safe place. We do not take people somewhere where they are threatened with torture, rape, and death. The EU must finally accept its responsibility and provide a predictable, reliable mechanism for disembarkation. The rescue of human lives must have the highest priority," says Michael Schwickart, Board member of United4Rescue. At the beginning of the year, the alliance made the purchase of the 'Sea-Watch 4 powered by United4Rescue' possible.

The inhuman waiting despite the most challenging conditions on board is a political move. The merchant ship Etienne, which rescued 27 people who were in distress in the Maltese search and rescue zone more than three weeks ago, is still denied a port of safety by Malta. In the midday hours of today's Thursday, the Sea-Watch 4 passed the Etienne and sent solidarity greetings via radio.

"In the last six months, Malta has shamelessly proved several times that it is willing to let all humanity go overboard to prevent refugees and migrants from reaching their ports. From ghost ships that deport people back to Libya in open violation of international law to offshore refugee prisons on the high seas, to stand-offs like that of Etienne. Although the 27 people got into distress in the Maltese search and rescue zone and were rescued by the Etienne under Malta's coordination, they are now left at sea for 22 days. The Maltese rescue coordination center has also made it abundantly clear to us on Sea-Watch 4 that they will not provide us with a port of safety and forbid us from approaching their territorial waters. This island is by far not only geographically the outpost of Europe, but also the outpost of a racist, European policy of isolation. The rescued people on the Etienne and Sea-Watch 4 have the right to a port of safety, and they need it now", says Philipp Hahn, Operations Manager on board the Sea-Watch 4.

The responsibility for the inhumane situation at Europe's borders is not only incumbent on the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. It is the EU's responsibility to ensure that maritime and fundamental rights are respected and to act in solidarity. This includes not only the allocation of a port of safety but also the distribution of rescued people within the EU. This distribution must take place on land and must not be carried out on the backs of rescued persons who are then denied disembarkation for days or weeks. Germany bears a special responsibility in this respect, more than 170 cities have declared themselves safe places within the Seebrücke Movement, which want to receive rescued people. It is up to the politicians not to stand in the way of solidarity from cities and municipalities and to make this reception possible.

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