



**SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES**

16 March 2016

Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you today increasingly alarmed by the failure of European leaders to respond humanely to people arriving irregularly in Europe. Given that 88% of those crossing the Mediterranean Sea come from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries, the majority are very likely to be in need of international protection.

Yet the latest proposals emerging from EU and Turkish leaders represent an extremely worrying backward step in the protection of refugees. Any deal that involves blanket returns of 'irregular migrants arriving in Greece' is incompatible with EU and international law, violating the right to seek asylum that was established by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in complete dereliction of the principle of *non refoulement*.

That it can be considered a solution to return people to a country already hosting the largest numbers of refugees in the world, that will not recognise them as refugees nor afford them the international protection they are entitled to, is quite frankly extraordinary and emblematic of an approach that seeks to keep refugees at arm's length. This approach is causing untold suffering and requires an urgent rethink.

I enclose a copy of a recent letter from ECRE, the European Council of Refugees and Exiles, of which the Refugee Council is a long-standing member, to the President of the European Council and President of the European Commission. The letter sets out what a humane EU-wide response would entail, including the urgent need for European leaders to offer safe haven to a greater number of the world's refugees; both those who have already arrived in Europe and also those who are trapped in poorer countries. We urge you to advocate for the changes proposed by ECRE in the forthcoming meeting of the European Council.

As a country we can be proud to have offered refuge to many people fleeing for their lives since the signing of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a Convention that British lawyers helped to draft. However, this tradition is seriously undermined by systematic efforts to contain refugees in poorer countries.

There is an urgent need for European leaders to put protecting refugees at the top of the agenda. We hope you will lead the way.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maurice Wren".

Maurice Wren
Chief Executive
Refugee Council