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Press release | 15.11.2021

Greens/EFA MEPs call for end to criminal charges against Humanitarian Workers

Greece

Today, over 71 MEPs have sent an open letter to the European Commission and the Greek government, in support of humanitarian workers facing possible 25 years' imprisonment as Greece cracks down on activists engaged in search and rescue. This Thursday, the trial of humanitarian workers will start in Greece and could result in the activists spending up to 25 years in prison. The letter, which was drafted by Greens/EFA MEP Grace O'Sullivan, expresses serious concerns over charges levelled against 24 humanitarian workers by Greek prosecutors for their role in search and rescue missions on the island of Lesbos in 2018.

Grace O'Sullivan MEP, Greens/EFA Member who drafted the letter, comments:

"Humanitarian workers like Seán Binder, who put their lives on the line in often treacherous conditions in order to save the lives of the most vulnerable people, should be celebrated in Europe as a model of solidarity. Instead, time and time again, humanitarian assistance is criminalised in an attempt to discourage lifesaving care for migrants and refugees on the EU's external borders.

"It is a basic tenet of international law that those in distress at sea must be rescued. I am proud to be joined today by so many MEPs from across political parties to bring public pressure on EU governments such as Greece to change their policies towards humanitarian workers and ultimately drop the charges against Seán and his colleagues."

Erik Marquardt MEP, Greens/EFA Member of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, comments:

"The accusations against Seán Binder, Sarah Mardini and others are false and only serve the purpose to criminalise the lifesaving act of rescuing people. The criminalisation of humanitarian aid is taking Europe to the abyss. The Commission must not allow humanitarianism to be punished while human rights violations by

EU states go unpunished.

“Humanitarian workers saving lives at sea are actually doing what is the obligation and responsibility of the EU and its Member States, including Greece. Not only are Member States and the EU refusing to live up to their obligations, they are criminalising and punishing those who attempt to step in and fill the gap. Greece, the EU and all of us standing for human rights should be grateful to Seán Binder, Sarah Mardini and all those bravely saving lives instead of upholding fortress Europe. They are the ones acting in line with the values the EU was founded upon, they represent and honour the dignity of Europe and its citizens. Saving lives is not a crime."

More:
The letter has been sent to Commission President von der Leyen, Commissioners Schinas, Johansson and Reynders, and also the Greek Ministers for Migration and Justice, Mitrachis and Tsiaras respectively. The letter can be found online here.
On 21st August 2018, Greek Police arrested humanitarian workers Seán Binder, Sarah Mardini, Nassos Karakitsos and others working with the non-profit organisation Emergency Response Centre International (ECRI) and charged them with a number of serious crimes including espionage (linked to their use of the common encrypted messaging app WhatsApp), forgery and membership of an illegal organisation. At the time, ECRI was running a search and rescue programme on Lesbos, as well as a medical clinic offering primary care in the Moria refugee camp, in cooperation with Greek authorities.

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Responsible MEPs



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