



CONFERENTIA
EPISCOPALIS
MELITENSIS

15th April 2020

Your Eminence

We write with reference to the dramatic events unfolding at sea, a number of miles south of where we are standing, where 47 men, women and children are stuck on an NGO rescue vessel in Malta's search and rescue area waiting to be allowed to disembark. As you are no doubt aware, this boat is but one of four boats sighted by Frontex on 11th April between Malta/Italy and Libya, one of which is rumoured to have sunk with some 55 people on board.

Today, after they had been at sea for 4 days, Aita Mari, an NGO search and rescue vessel, came to their assistance. We are reliably informed that their situation is still extremely precarious, not only because bad weather is approaching, but also because there are no emergency or medical personnel on board the Aita Mari.

Malta has refused to allow the migrants to disembark. This is in line with a decision, taken by the Cabinet on Friday 10th April, stating that Malta's ports are unsafe and that migrants will not be allowed to enter, on account of the state of emergency caused by the spread of COVID19. This notwithstanding, we have approached the Maltese authorities to ask them to allow the migrants to disembark in Malta.

To His Eminence

CARDINAL PIERPAOLO PAROLIN
Secretary of State

VATICAN CITY

In view of the huge pressures that Malta is currently facing, we are writing to you to ask you to use your good offices to intervene with other EU member states and ask them to support Malta by accepting to relocate all or some of the migrants on board.

We are making this request as we acknowledge that Malta's reception and asylum systems are currently struggling to cope with the large number of boat arrivals that the country has received in recent months. Just days ago, the Maltese Armed Forces rescued some 64 migrants from a vessel in distress, bringing the number of arrivals this year alone to almost 1200. During 2019, a total of 3,400 asylum seekers arrived in Malta and, between June and December 2018, Malta received over 1445 boat arrivals. Although a number of these asylum seekers were relocated to other EU member states, the majority of them remained in Malta.

In the light of this reality, we ask you to intervene in this case to advocate for a solution that is based on solidarity and respect for human dignity.

+ Charles J. Scicluna

✠ Charles Jude Scicluna
President, Maltese Episcopal Conference

+ Mario Grech

✠ Mario Grech
Apostolic Administrator for Gozo

+ Joseph Galea-Curmi

✠ Joseph Galea-Curmi
Auxiliary bishop

Fr Jimmy Bonnici

General Secretary
Maltese Episcopal Conference

