

Resolution on the global response to the refugee crisis

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 81st World Congress in Quebec City 2015

More than 500,000 people have risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea so far this year. Over 3,000 have not survived the dangerous crossing, including three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose photo stirred the hearts of the world public and became a symbol for an outpouring of condemnation of the failure of European nations to provide protection.

In April 2015, moved by the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean, a delegation of PEN members met with the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, to present a petition signed by over a thousand writers asking European member states to meet their humanitarian obligations to protect refugees through common, humane asylum laws. The proposals of the delegation were warmly welcomed by the European Parliament.

Since April however, the world has witnessed one of the greatest humanitarian crises since the Second World War as hundreds of thousands of people fleeing persecution and war in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have risked their lives in an attempt to reach safety and protection. Around the world, people have demonstrated extraordinary solidarity with asylum seeking families as they make their journeys across the continent. Yet European and global institutions and governments have remained divided, chaotic and ineffective in their response to this humanitarian crisis.

The lack of legal routes to find safety in countries with resources to host them lies at the heart of this problem. Thousands of refugee parents are risking the lives of their children on unsafe smuggling boats primarily because they have no other choice. European countries – as well as governments in other regions, especially North America and the Gulf States – must make some fundamental changes to allow for larger resettlement and humanitarian responses.

PEN's expanding programme of protection work with writers at risk demonstrates the need for expanded visa and sponsorship programmes, scholarships and other ways for persecuted writers to enter other countries legally. Furthermore, family reunification must become an accessible option for many more people than is currently the case.

While border security should be recognised as necessary for national security this must not put the lives of refugees in danger. The deaths of refugees should be neither legitimised nor tolerated in the name of protecting borders. The protection of human life must have the highest priority. Governments must take measures to temper the fears of their citizens and decrease the risks of xenophobia.

This is a defining moment for the world and we have no other choice but to mobilize fully around this crisis. Draft Monday 12 October 2015

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on all nations to:

- substantially increase the number of refugee resettlement spaces;
- develop refugee determination processes that are timely, fair and treat every claimant with dignity;
- refrain from violent policies and practices that aim to deter or prevent people from crossing their borders;
- provide more funding to support countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees fleeing conflict, including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey

- call on refugee-hosting communities and governments to facilitate access to basic social services for asylum seekers and refugees;
- take all possible measures to combat xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment. Monday, 12 October 2015
- address the inadequacy of legislation to deal humanely with individuals caught in crisis