



To:

The Hellenic Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis MITRACHIS,
The Hellenic Minister for Justice, Konstantinos TSIARAS,
The European Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, Margaritis SCHINAS,
The European Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, Ylva JOHANSSON,
The European Commissioner for Justice, Didier REYNDERS.

Sarah Mardini, Seán Binder, Nassos Karakitsos and 21 others face trial on the 18th of November on the Greek island of Lesbos.

Sarah, Seán and Nassos spent more than three months in pre-trial detention in 2018 and are facing trial for people smuggling, being part of a criminal organisation, espionage and money laundering, which could carry a sentence of up to 25 years in jail. A trial that seeks to criminalise saving lives and solidarity according to human rights organisations.¹ On 18 November 2021, after three long years of uncertainty, court proceedings will finally start on Lesbos.

The charges are exceptionally serious but are far from uncommon as authorities across Europe continue to criminalise people and organisations that assist and support refugees and save lives (at sea and on land). In 2019, 171 individuals across 13 European states faced criminalisation² and between 2020 and 2021 at least 44 people in Greece faced similar accusations like those against Sarah, Seán and Nassos.³ Criminalisation coincides with the securitisation of borders and worrying instances of pushbacks and collective expulsion, especially at sea.

The humanitarian assistance of people like Seán, Sarah and Nassos has been essential as at least 1,675 people have lost their lives or gone missing on the East Mediterranean sea since 2015.⁴ Since their release from pre-trial detention, they have campaigned tirelessly against the criminalisation of solidarity and for refugee rights. If found guilty, their case could set a worrying precedent with adverse implications for humanitarian assistance far beyond Greece. Therefore XX civil society organisations stand with Sarah, Seán and Nassos and call on:

¹ Greece: Facing jail for saving lives: Sarah Mardini and Seán Binder (*Amnesty International*, 14 October 2019) <[link](#)> accessed 3 November 2021; Greece: Rescuers at Sea Face Baseless Accusations (*Human Rights Watch*, 5 November 2018) <[link](#)> accessed 3 November 2021

² Help is No Crime: Are EU Policies Moving in the Right Direction? (Picum, October 2021) <[link](#)> accessed 3 November 2021

³ Greece files against 33 NGO members for assisting human traffickers (*Keep Talking Greece*, 8 September 2020) <[link](#)> accessed 20 November 2020; Τέλος στη δράση ευρωπαϊκών ΜΚΟ που διευκόλυναν την διακίνηση μεταναστών από την Τουρκία στη Λέσβο (*Vima Press*, 8 September 2020) <[link](#)> accessed 20 November; Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection ‘19-07-2021: (4) μέλη Μ.Κ.Ο. και (6) υπήκοοι τρίτων χωρών περιλαμβάνονται σε δικογραφία για οργανωμένη δράση ατόμων που δραστηριοποιούνταν στη διευκόλυνση της παράνομης εισόδου αλλοδαπών στην ελληνική επικράτεια μέσω των νησιών του Βορειοανατολικού Αιγαίου (19 July 2021) <[link](#)> accessed 27 September 2021; Giannis Souliotis ‘Μεταναστευτικό: Βαριές διώξεις εις βάρος μελών τεσσάρων ΜΚΟ’ (Kathimerini, 20 July 2021)

⁴ Missing Migrant Project (*IOM*) <[link](#)> accessed 5 October 2021

- The Greek authorities to drop all charges against Seán, Sarah, Nassos and the other 21 charged and recognise their work as humanitarian assistance and essential for saving lives at sea.
- Greek authorities and EU institutions to ensure that the principles of a fair trial are upheld and that independent trial monitoring will be allowed during these trials.
- European institutions to do more to prevent criminalisation and encourage member states to include exemptions for humanitarian assistance in their national legislation whilst ensuring that those member states who have such an exemption apply them.

11 November 2021

Co-signed by:

1. ASTERIAS - STARFISH FOUNDATION
2. Better Days
3. Better Life With Refugees
4. Border Violence Monitoring Network
5. borderline-europe Human Rights without Borders e.V.
6. Choosehumanity (Switzerland)
7. Collective Aid BiH
8. Derbyshire Refugee Solidarity
9. Distribute Aid
10. Donate4Refugees
11. Dutch Council for Refugees
12. Europe Must Act
13. Fountain solicitors
14. Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
15. Herts for Refugees
16. Hope Cafe Athens
17. HumanRights360
18. Humans for Rights Network
19. I HAVE RIGHTS.
20. Just Action
21. Khalifa Ihler Institute
22. Khora Community Centre
23. kitev
24. Koraki
25. LeaveNoOneBehind
26. Legal Centre Lesvos

27. Lesvos Solidarity
28. Lighthouse Relief (LHR)
29. Love Without Borders-For Refugees in Need
30. Massive Outpouring of Love (MOOL)
31. Migration Policy Group
32. MIGREAT
33. One Family - No Borders
34. OpenEmbassy
35. Oxfam
36. Pampiraiki Support Initiative for Refugees and Migrants
37. ProAsyl
38. Project Armonia
39. ReFOCUS Media Labs
40. Refugee Biryani & Bananas
41. Refugee Legal Support
42. Refugee Rescue
43. Rethinking Refugees
44. Samos Advocacy Collective
45. Samos LGBTQI+ Group
46. Samos Volunteers
47. ShowerPower
48. Still I Rise
49. Wells Refugee Aid