



08.12.2020 Tromsø, Norway

## Press Statement

We are astonished at this unprovoked and deliberately misleading attack on our organisation.

Aegean Boat Report, in common with all aid organisations working to help the Greek government and the EU with the refugee response in Greece, strongly opposes people smuggling between Turkey and Greece.

We are not, never have been and never will be part of any smuggling network and we do not work, have never worked, and will never work with any person or people smuggling people on any route, in any part of the world.

We operate a public service, accessible to all, which locates men, women and children who arrive on the Greek islands, in part because the Greek government consistently fails to perform this basic function.

Once they are located, we ensure that they are taken to camps where they can enter the proper legal processes.

We are forced to do this because the men, women and children travelling to the EU are well aware by now that the Greek government practices illegal pushbacks, and if we did not help to ensure that they were found, they would attempt to stay in hiding on arrival. This would be the worst of all possible outcomes for every person including the citizens of Greece and wider EU.

We do not deliver aid to those people, though the Minister should be pleased that some organisations do this, because without their work, the failures of his own Ministry would have caused hundreds more deaths than have taken place so far, and seen many men, women and children wandering Lesbos and other Eastern Aegean islands searching for shelter.

We must request the Minister ceases his baseless allegations, and advise him that if he wishes to allege we have acted illegally or improperly he must produce something more than a small number of refugees saying that smugglers in Turkey know the name 'Aegean Boat Report' and tell them if they attempt to contact us they will be given dry clothing and a bottle of water.

We have broken no law, we do not work with anyone who does, and it is inexplicable that a Minister of the Greek government would seek to launch such a wild attack on a small organisation trying to ensure that people forced by Greek and EU policy to take dangerous journeys presided over by criminals do not die and are not lost to the system.

Far from Aegean Boat Report and other NGOs, the major factor assisting smugglers and ensuring they profit from the suffering of refugees is the Greek government and EU's refusal to provide safe routes for people to travel and apply for asylum, which is their legal right.

None of the people arriving on the Greek islands are 'illegal immigrants'. They are asylum seekers exercising their fundamental human rights.

The Greek state may of course decide whether to grant asylum to Somalians, whose country is a failed state and which has been in a state of war for more than 30 years.

And we hope the Greek government will in fact focus its attention on that decision, instead of continuing its ill-researched and misleading attacks on aid organisations working to help people survive, and help the Greek state.

In this way, we believe it and the EU will be able to respond to the situation on its borders in a manner befitting civilised actors in the modern world.

### **Contact**

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