



Daily Message by the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Hon. Evarist Bartolo

15th May 2020

The Libyan humanitarian emergency - a very modest proposal

As Europe battles the coronavirus crisis on its soil, another major crisis is developing on its doorstep.

The conflict in Libya has been escalating since April, and the coronavirus pandemic is further exacerbating the situation. Hundreds of thousands of migrants there are being physically abused amidst scarce food supplies, inadequate healthcare and sharply rising house rents.

Migrant detention camps are overflowing, and according to a number of credible reports, thousands of migrants are either escaping from , or being allowed to leave these camps.

In this horrific context, there are all the ingredients for a major humanitarian disaster waiting to happen, as desperate people look to the Mediterranean Sea as their only escape. To make matters worse, humanitarian assistance on the ground is decreasing due to the pandemic.

The situation is further complicated as Italy, and more recently Malta, have both closed their ports to allow all resources, especially medical and those related to security, to be allocated to the mitigation and treatment of the coronavirus pandemic in our countries.

Per capita, Malta is facing a considerable threat from coronavirus and our limited medical and security resources are over-stretched.

At least offering some relief - if not a solution

In the past years, Malta has rescued thousands of migrants in difficulty at sea, going way beyond the call of duty. In a situation where demand for rescue increases exponentially because of more migrants leaving Libya and the supply side of our resources is substantially diminished, we find ourselves with a recipe for disaster.

The only sustainable and realistic option to avoid this humanitarian crisis and save the lives of men, women and children is for Europe to launch an immediate humanitarian mission in Libya - providing food, medicines and healthcare equipment to Libyans and migrants living there.

Alleviating or at least minimizing the difficult circumstances that migrants are living in will be an incentive for them to stay, rather than risk their lives in the Mediterranean Sea at a time of crisis, and with very limited rescue options.

It will also deter ruthless people smugglers from exploiting the misery of the most desperate. NGOs urging migrants to leave in this desperate context makes them unwitting participants , in this human tragedy.

In these difficult circumstances, the Maltese Government is proposing a way forward for the European Union to consider and act on – a substantial humanitarian mission to help Libyans and migrants in Libya.

Saving lives before it gets worse

The humanitarian aid from the European Union as proposed by the Maltese government must be imminent and substantial, in the form of a EU package of at least 100 million euros of food, aid, medical supplies and equipment.



This is not a time for half-measures. Malta is ready to play its part – and we will be there to assist in terms of logistical support for this humanitarian aid to arrive at its destination. We are also ready to assist Libya in the purchase of essential medical equipment to treat people.

Malta is proposing this option to save lives today, deter human traffickers and avoid the human tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean Sea.

Europe is now facing an existential crisis – it is not a time for soundbites but a time of action to save lives.

Malta is ready to play its part, but we are making it very clear that this continental challenge calls for a continental response. If Malta is left alone against this crisis of tsunami proportions - people, children, pregnant women and victims of rape, will die.

An island as big as a small European city cannot be asked to solve on its own, in the middle of a pandemic, the years of European missteps and inaction in Libya and on immigration.

Failure to launch or delays in launching this urgent humanitarian aid will mean more people in desperate conditions, more people without basic food and basic healthcare looking at desperate measures at sea as their only way out. We must release the pressure of this crisis and not let it explode.

The European Union must take immediate action today before it becomes a human catastrophe tomorrow.

Evarist Bartolo

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Malta