

# **UNITED for Intercultural Action**

## **European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees**

Postbus 413, NL-1000 AK Amsterdam, phone +31-20-6834778, fax +31-20-6834582,  
info@unitedagainstracism.org, www.unitedagainstracism.org

19/06/2003  
MEDIA RELEASE

### **20 June International Refugee Day**

## **"Weekly deaths at European borders - fatal realities of Fortress Europe"**

On Monday this week, many would-be-immigrants from Africa drowned near Sicily in a Sea tragedy. On Tuesday, in the Strait of Gibraltar Spanish marines rescued about 160 refugees, who got into distress. While the leader of Italy's far-right Lega Nord suggests to shoot "illegal" immigrants with cannons out of the water, thousands of refugees in desperate situations die at the borders of Fortress Europe.

UNITED, the European network against racism, monitors refugee deaths since 1993. The network of 560 anti-racist and refugee organisations has documentation over 3800 deaths, who for instance drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, the Strait of Gibraltar, suffocated in trucks or committed suicide in Europe's detention centers

On 18 June this year, BBC reported about a would-be-immigrant, who died after jumping into the English Channel. It seems that the 25-year-old man from the Ivory Coast decided to jump overboard when the crew found him hidden on the upper deck of a container ship.

Earlier this year, a 22-year old Nigerian died of a lack of medical care in the refugee transit center in Thurhof (CH), followed just a few days later by a 18-year-old Iraqi, who crushed to death while trying to climb on a lorry in Calais (F) on its way to England.

UNITED spokesperson Leon Wansleben says: "All these deaths tell us a simple truth: Refugees will keep on coming to Europe even if we try our best to lock up Europe's doors. On the EU summit in Thessaloniki on 20 and 21 June, the European leaders will discuss on how to protect the external borders from clandestine immigration. It is frightening that the push factor behind this policy of external border control is the desired decrease of asylum applications. Europe's commitment to the 1951 Geneva Convention, whose 52 anniversary is ironically celebrated on 20 June, is ignored at the moment."

UNITED also criticizes UK's proposal for EU 'Transit Processing Centers', which will be discussed in Thessaloniki. Human Rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call such centers "unlawful and unworkable" driving even more refugees underground.

UNITED is convinced that instead Europe should turn to policies that address the causes for flight. Global social injustice and world-wide armed conflicts make people leave everything behind and risk their lives. "If we do not take care that the global political and socio-economic situation gets better, we cannot realistically expect people to stay in situations that we ourselves would find unbearable. Our commitment to human rights demands us to see refugees as human beings with individuals rights and needs."

### **20 JUNE INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE DAY**

Many non-governmental organisations co-operate in support of refugees around 20 June, the International Refugee Day 2003. In nearly all European countries activities take place, for example:

- In Great-Britain, several human rights and refugee organisations organise a Refugee Week with more than 160 activities all over the country. Please check [www.refugeeweek.org.uk/](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/)
- The African Refugee Network in Ireland organises the "World Refugee Day Awards"

More information about the refugee campaign and a list of refugee death cases:

<http://www.unitedagainstracism.org>