

EUROPEAN UMBRELLA MARCH World Refugee Day, 20 June 2011

To mark World Refugee Day, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) is coordinating the **European Umbrella March** for the second year running. 15 ECRE Member Organisations in seven countries are organising Umbrella Marches using the umbrella as the symbol for the need to protect those fleeing war and persecution today.

Brussels, 17 June 2011. 2011 celebrates the 60th Anniversary of the **1951 Refugee Convention** to which each EU Member State is a signatory. Born of the ashes of World War II, the Refugee Convention was signed and ratified to ensure that people fleeing persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion are protected in another country. The Refugee Convention continues to be the cornerstone of the global protection regime. Today, more than ever, States should rely on the Convention to provide shelter to those who are fleeing persecution. Its ongoing relevance is once more illustrated by the current events in North Africa and Middle East.

It is imperative that Europe continues to strive to uphold the spirit and principles of the Convention by ensuring protection for those who need it. In light of World Refugee Day and the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, **ECRE**, as an alliance of refugee-assisting non governmental organisations working across Europe calls on the European governments and the EU to:

Ensure access to protection: States must guarantee that the right to asylum is respected in practice and ensure access to protection for those fleeing war, persecution and violence. Ever stricter border controls, at Europe's borders and beyond, prevent refugees from reaching Europe thereby forcing the most vulnerable to embark on dangerous journeys in a bid to reach a safe haven. European governments must ensure that border controls and measures adopted to tackle irregular migration are protection sensitive.

End the protection lottery: Within the EU, huge differences persist among the national asylum systems resulting in an **asylum lottery**. As the EU is in the process of creating a Common European Asylum System, ECRE insists that this system establish a level playing field where any person seeking protection will be treated fairly, according to the highest standards possible, wherever in Europe they apply for asylum.

Share the responsibility to protect refugees: It is deplorable that in times of humanitarian crises on Europe's border, some EU countries seek to close their borders rather than sharing responsibility with their neighbours on both sides of the Mediterranean. ECRE calls on European states to show concrete solidarity with those countries hosting the majority of the world's refugees, including through **resettlement** in significant numbers.

Protecting refugees is not a choice but an obligation. Europe must show leadership and play its part in upholding the very essence of the 1951 Refugee Convention, that is the right to protection.

Notes to editors:

- The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) is a network of some 70 refugee-assisting organisations in 30 European countries, working together to protect and promote respect for refugees.
- The first Umbrella March to celebrate World Refugee Day was organised in Lyon, France, in 2004, by Forum Réfugiés, an ECRE Member in France.

- From traditional marches to circus performances, supporters of rights for refugees and asylum seekers are taking to the streets or tight-ropes to send the message of the need to protect refugees. For information on the national events and contact points, follow the relevant link: [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Czech Republic](#), [France](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Portugal](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) and have a look at the [pictures of the day](#).

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