

STATEMENT BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF MALTA AND BY THE BISHOP OF GOZO

HUMAN LIFE FIRST AND FOREMOST

The recent events of immigrants losing their lives while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in their attempt to reach European shores rightly sadden very deeply all those who truly cherish the value of human life irrespective of whom the person is.

Here we are dealing with a human as well as with a political problem that are intertwined though not to be confused.

As has already been stated on the 17th May, 2006, in a statement issued by the Maltese bishops on the phenomenon of migration, it is our duty as a People to strive to form a correct conscience that conceives in each and every one of us and in us all as a People and as a Nation, coherence between those human and Christian values that we subscribe to and our actual behaviour. On that occasion, the Bishops reminded us that as Christians, we are called by our deeds, to see Jesus himself in our neighbour, whoever he or she might be, and coming from whichever country, especially in our neighbour who suffers.

One cannot fail to appreciate the serious difficulties which our civil authorities are facing, as well as all the efforts made and being made by Malta so that those persons who are in need of help in the relatively large search and rescue region for which Malta is responsible receive all assistance that is required. One can also understand that when a small country such as ours is already shouldering a heavy burden, it naturally expects that other much larger countries also fulfill their obligations in similar situations. It is only right that our country expects that our partner countries, members of the European Union not only express understanding for the serious problems faced by our country, but concretely and in a spirit of true solidarity, assist the Maltese authorities so that these immigrants receive the treatment they deserve as human beings. However, we also believe that even in cases where responsibility for rescue lies with other States, our country should do all that is possible to ensure that there is no loss of human life.

While our country renews such commitment, it remains necessary that the international community, especially the European Union, translates its expressions of solidarity into concrete facts first and foremost with our brothers and sisters who find themselves in danger whilst crossing the Mediterranean Sea in the hope of a better life, as well as with our own population faced with the enormous problems brought about by the phenomenon of illegal immigration. We feel that this places on the international community, especially on the European Union, the duty to strengthen all efforts and policies in favour of the development of those countries from where these immigrants originate so that in such countries, economic and political systems are put into place that create wealth and ensure that it is justly distributed to all members of that society.

We are also sending this message to our brothers, bishops of the Member States of the European Union (COMECE) in order to invite them to spare no efforts with their governments that would strengthen better coordination as well as effective assistance aimed at saving human lives.

+ Paul Cremona
Archbishop of Malta

+ Mario Grech
Bishop of Gozo

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