



Fr Olivier Poquillon OP
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)
Square de Meeûs, 19/1
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium

3rd January 2019

Dear Fr Poquillon,

We, the Bishops of Malta and Gozo, are writing to express our deep concern and to ask for the support of our brother bishops in Europe, with regards to the situation involving 49 migrants stranded for days in the Mediterranean Sea.

Ironically, as we Catholics were celebrating the birth of Our Lord who was rejected at birth, a group of 32 migrants was refused shelter by Europe after being rescued at sea off Libya. They have now been out at sea on a rescue vessel for no less than 13 days, only being allowed to enter Maltese territorial waters yesterday, Wednesday 2nd January, to shelter from a storm. A second group of 17 migrants rescued by another NGO vessel has been stranded at sea for five days.

One can only imagine the added suffering endured by those men, women and children, whose only 'fault' is that of fleeing a cruel environment in hope for a better life, one which respects the human dignity we Catholics and Europeans strongly promote as one of our fundamental values.

This situation, which is now in desperate need of action, has prompted us Maltese Bishops to repeatedly appeal to the leaders of our country to express solidarity in a tangible way. Despite the constraints on receptivity due to its small size and the high population density, Malta is playing an important role in rescuing and when possible relocating migrants. In recent days, the Armed Forces of Malta rescued at sea and brought to Malta 249 migrants who were in distress. The Church in Malta is actively cooperating with the Malta Government to offer accommodation and hospitality to these migrants.

We understand that such complex situations require a European solution, which is why we urge you to invite the Episcopal Conferences across Europe to take similar action and appeal to the leaders of their respective countries. At the same time, we invite Catholics across Europe to strongly pray that this missionary continent will cherish the Christian values that have formed its identity by showing solidarity and saving our brothers and sisters in need.

In Christ,

✠ Charles J. Scicluna
Archbishop of Malta
President of the Maltese Episcopal Conference

✠ Mario Grech
Bishop of Gozo

✠ Joseph Galea-Curmi
Auxiliary Bishop of Malta