Human Rights Council, 38th Session
25th June 2018
Item 3 – General debate
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Mr. Vice President:

The work of SOS Mediterranee¹ to rescue migrants who are stranded in the attempt to reach Europe by sea is actively supported by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and by our local branch MIR Italia who will be hosting an international conference on migration in Catania, Sicily at the beginning of November.

Everyone in this room is surely aware of last week’s headlines about the diversion of SOS Mediterranee’s rescue ship Aquarius to Spain². Such grandstanding, for narrow partisan political advantage seeks to stir the population against those who are doing their humanitarian duty and cynically misleads the public about the true nature of humanitarian action. In the days since the Aquarius was diverted³ and Italian ports were declared officially closed to migrants⁴, even greater numbers of migrants than those who were on board the Aquarius have arrived in Sicily⁵.

¹ SOS MEDITERRANEE is a European maritime and humanitarian organization founded in 2015 for the rescue of life in the Mediterranean. 
https://sosmediterranee.com/about-us/
² SOS MEDITERRANEE press release of June 12th 2018.
³ Aquarius operations take place in coordination with the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC) in Rome, which is the first to receive calls from boats in distress. Once calls are received, the Aquarius is given more detailed instructions as well as the coordinates of the SAR-area. Once the crew has located the affected boat, speedboats are dispatched towards the boat in distress. Life jackets are distributed to the passengers and individuals in distress are taken aboard the Aquarius, where they are received by the medical team and provided with first aid. The MRCC also gives instructions on which port to call to disembark the rescued.
https://sosmediterranee.com/our-mission/
⁴ Matteo Salvini, Italian Interior Minister, declared on Sunday June 10th that Italy’s ports are closed to migrant vessels.
⁵ The Diciotti Italian coastguard ship carrying more than 900 hundred migrants was allowed to dock in Catania, Sicily on Wednesday June 13th.
https://www.thelocal.it/20180613/diciotti-italian-ship-900-rescued-migrants-sicily
It is time to stop pretending that there is a stark dichotomy between “genuine” refugees and “mere economic migrants”. All of us, migrants included, are entitled to the full range of human rights, civil and political – included freedom of movement-, economic and social. The international community cannot overlook the plight of those who find conditions, whether political or economic, in the land of their birth so intolerable that they are prepared, at crippling cost, to embark upon a journey which they know entails a high risk of death.

Some of the worst conditions in the world which drive migration are found in Eritrea. In that context, we would like to invite everyone to the side-event on Thursday 28th June, co-hosted by IFOR and War Resisters’ International, which focusses specifically on migration from Eritrea.

I thank you.