



Samos Volunteers NGO
Dimitrou Petrou 2
83100 Samos
Greece

www.samosvolunteers.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Humanitarian Crisis on Samos Reaches Breaking Point Samos Volunteers calling on Greek authorities to act



People sleeping outside the camp's fence line without shelter.

Samos (05 October 2017) – Samos Volunteers.

In a refugee camp with a designed capacity of 700 people, the population size has now become insupportable. There are currently over 2200¹ people staying in and around the camp, heading in the direction of last year, when it reached up to 2,400 people, and it is only the beginning of October. We expect many more to attempt the crossing, before the weather makes the journey too perilous. The level of overcrowding is causing a severe deterioration in the health and wellbeing of people who have limited access to shelter, basic sanitation and medical facilities. Not enough shelter is provided for the constant influx of people arriving by boat from Turkey. People are forced to sleep in pop-up tents and make-shift shelters, at least a hundred of which are set up in the woodland areas around the camp.

Unacceptable living conditions

There is a high safety risk for everyone, especially for those living outside the camp, amongst them women and children without a safe place to sleep or proper toilet and hygiene facilities. Many people have to live in the camp for long periods, at times for more than a year, waiting for their asylum applications to be processed.

¹ <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>



Immediate action is needed

Bogdan Andrei, coordinator of Samos Volunteers (SV), calls for immediate action to ease living conditions.

Andrei comments: *“This is the worst camp situation I have encountered on Samos in the past two years. The approaching rain season, with literally no concrete plan of action by the authorities, makes the circumstances even more difficult. When the rain starts, hundreds of people will be flooded out of their tents and left without a place to sleep, facing severe security risks as a result. Large-scale riots can happen at any time.”*

Situation will worsen as winter arrives

As in previous years, winter on Samos will see further deterioration of conditions in the camp.

Andrei comments: *“Samos Volunteers is now the only remaining volunteer organisation on Samos, which puts extra pressure on our limited resources and ability to help and cover the gaps left by other NGOs. We face a very challenging period, where basic needs like shelter will become our top priorities, together with keeping people dry and warm. No actor present on the island currently has the ability to effectively assist those in need.”*



There is limited access to basic hygiene and risks to physical personal safety, especially at night.

Decreasing presence of NGOs on Samos

In the past, close collaboration between NGOs has proved essential to compensate for areas which the camp authorities have failed to address. However, the number of NGOs active on Samos is shrinking, which diminishes the effectiveness and access to essential services needed for the refugees. At the same time, severe shortcomings in coordination and cooperation from the authorities hinders our ability to supply provisions to people in need while work towards decongesting the camp grinds to a halt.



Boat Refugee Foundation (BRF²), a Dutch NGO, provided medical support in the camp since February 2016. BRF has regularly collaborated with SV on projects and activities, but has recently ended its mission on Samos.

Anke Messiaen, BRF coordinator on Samos comments: *"It should not be the goal to cover every need by ourselves, so it's essential that all actors in the camp work together as much as possible. When I was here in the beginning there were 1,100 [people in the camp] and now it's doubled in three months and we still have the same amount of volunteers. A lot of people are sick, a lot of kids with fever. It's inhumane and I don't think anybody can call this a normal situation. When it starts raining or even snowing, I cannot imagine what it will mean for the people."*

Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF³), active in the camp since 2016, also voices strong concerns. Antigoni Karkanaki, MSF coordinator on Samos comments: *"Unfortunately, the need for decongesting the camp has not yet been addressed by the authorities. This situation makes the desperate people who arrive on the island feel deserted by everyone. Vulnerable cases are being handled inadequately, and even those who are not vulnerable under these circumstances are at risk for their mental and physical health."*

UNHCR statistics⁴

According to estimates by the UNHCR:

- Number of arrivals constantly higher than departures to the mainland (Sep 17: 936 arrivals, 250 departures)
- Over 1,100 people live in unheated accommodation on Samos
- Approximately 760 children currently live in the camp
- Nearly 100 unaccompanied minors (a person below the age of 18, who has arrived in Greece alone, without a responsible adult) currently live in the camp

Samos Volunteers is calling for the Reception and Identification Service along with the authorities, as representatives of the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy, to fulfil their mandate to protect foreign nationals when they arrive on the island. They are asked to treat people with dignity and respect, and to significantly improve the steadily deteriorating conditions by decongesting the camp through increased transfers to the mainland.

Samos Volunteers have been providing an emergency response to refugees landing on the island since autumn 2015, starting as a collective of independent volunteers. SV distributes emergency clothes packs and blankets to new arrivals in camp and runs informal education and psycho-social programmes in their community centre as well as in the camp and shelters.

Media Contact: Sabine Klasen
admin@samosvolunteers.org

² <https://bootvluchteling.nl/en/>

³ <http://www.msf.org/en/where-we-work/greece>

⁴ UNHCR estimates: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>