

African and European Civil Society Statement Valletta Senior Officials Meeting 8-9 February 2017

On the occasion of the one-year review of the Valletta Action Plan, African and European civil society have brought together their views and concerns about this process as well as parallel policies and frameworks designed to restrict people's movement across continents.

The Valletta Political Declaration of 11-12 November 2015 committed to respecting the dignity of refugees and migrants and protection of their human rights, regardless of their status. It also expressed concern about the suffering, abuse and exploitation of vulnerable migrants, particularly children and women, and the loss of life in the desert and at sea.

Civil society shares this commitment and concern. We object, however, to an approach that treats migration as negative and unsustainable rather than as a dynamic and mutually beneficial process. We are concerned that measures taken recently to restrict migration have exacerbated risks to vulnerable people, forcing them into the hands of smugglers and traffickers. We urge the creation of more channels for legal migration and, critically, access to safety for people in need of protection.

At this time of appraisal of the Valletta Action Plan, we also point to the lack of a structured role for civil society in informing these important political processes and interventions. **Civil society insists on a voice.** This means an unambiguous and non-negotiable role in design, implementation and monitoring of measures taken. This requires ongoing communication between governments and civil society, including migrants.

A recent survey and face-to-face consultations conducted with African and European civil society organisations reveal that processes and policies are deemed opaque and that civil society actors feel neither informed nor consulted about decisions that profoundly affect migrants and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. The process over the past year has fueled mistrust about the objectives of new policies. To address this, policy-makers must:

SAVE LIVES AND PROTECT HUMAN DIGNITY

- Recognise that political problems require political solutions and take bold action to address and resolve conflict and persecution.
- Ensure robust protection mechanisms are in place. The most vulnerable must be protected, including people in transit and vulnerable irregular migrants stranded in Europe, unable to go forward or back.
- Protect the right to seek and enjoy asylum. The “fight against irregular migration” must not close borders to people at risk.
- Ensure an adequate share of resettlement places and other legal avenues are available to refugees in Africa



- Ensure that human rights and protection standards are in place before embarking on return and readmission agreements or operations.
- Treat humanitarian and development assistance as ends in themselves and do not instrumentalise them to prevent migration.
- Take a long-term approach to addressing the negative root causes of migration and forced displacement. The underlying dynamics are highly complex, and quick fixes either fail or are unsustainable.

BUILD RESILIENT PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

- Ensure that measures taken to reduce irregular migration do not negatively impact mobility and economic integration in the Regional Economic Communities in Africa.
- Engage diaspora groups holistically, and not just as providers of resources through remittances and investment. Create opportunities for them to be active in mentoring and peacebuilding, and through sharing their experiences of forced migration.
- Facilitate avenues of legal migration in Europe for low and medium skilled workers from Africa to enhance opportunity and fill labour gaps.
- Actively strengthen and build the capacity of CSOs in Africa to ensure an effective partnership in the implementation of the Valletta Action Plan.
- Ensure that CSOs are central actors in the social and economic reintegration of returnees. Promote stronger interaction between European and African CSOs to better prepare and accompany long-term return and reintegration processes.

ENGAGE IN A REAL PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

- Monitoring mechanisms and the review process must measure negative or unintended consequences as well as positive impacts of the Valletta Action Plan and other processes and platforms.
- Ensure civil society has an active and institutionalised role in both policy design and monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the VAP and related processes.
- Make funding directly accessible to African and European civil society organisations, which are best able to judge and respond to needs on the ground, and remove any barriers that prevent local organisations from accessing funding.
- Address the lack of transparency in funding processes and eligibility criteria. The complexity and diversity of existing tools require significant additional efforts to bring clarity in the process and transparency in the allocation.
- Ensure that regional organisations, such as the AU, and international organisations with mandated protection roles, have a place in the dialogue, and are not merely included so that their presence provides a 'rubber stamp' to decisions already made.

The concerns expressed are drawn from a survey and consultation with African and European civil society platforms and organisations (CSOs) conducted by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe and Caritas Senegal, Coordinator of the Migration and Development Civil Society (MADE) network in Africa. This summary does not reflect the views of any one organisation. Detailed survey results can be seen at http://madenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Results%20civil%20society%20survey_Valletta%20-%2030%20Jan.pdf