

A deal between the EU and Turkey would deny refugees protection, says Irish Refugee Council and Doras Luimní

Press statement: 14th March 2016

This morning Irish Refugee Council and Doras Luimní wrote to the Taoiseach, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Justice together with all TDs, Senators and MEPs calling on the acting government not to sign up to the EU-Turkey deal.

Sue Conlan, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council, said “We are calling on the acting Irish government to refuse to sign up to a proposal of the European Council, discussed on 7th March 2016, forcing refugees who have entered the EU back to Turkey. The proposed deal, in exchange for a further €3bn, resettlement of Syrians from Turkey as well as increased rights of entry to the EU for Turkish nationals, would breach international obligations not to return refugees to a country where they may face persecution or serious harm.”

On 17th and 18th March 2016, Heads of State or government of the 28 EU countries will meet in Brussels for a meeting of the European Council. They will be joined by the Prime Minister of Turkey. On the agenda will be a possible agreement with Turkey to provide an additional €3bn. to enable them to support Syrian refugees and for Turkey agreeing to take back ‘illegal’ or ‘irregular migrants’ on the grounds that, for every Syrian taken back, EU countries will resettle one more Syrian national. Several countries have expressed concern over the possible agreement which was discussed during a European Council meeting with the Turkish Prime Minister on 7th March 2016. The UN has indicated that it may be illegal and a breach of international law.

Sue Conlan, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council, said “To date, Ireland has agreed to make a contribution of €22m to an initial EU payment to Turkey of €3bn. No indication has yet been given as to whether Ireland will contribute any further payments to Turkey or accept any more refugees other than those agreed to in September 2015. However, the danger is that, notwithstanding that Ireland only has a caretaker government at present, decisions may be made which will see Ireland, with other EU states, sign up to an agreement that sees Syrians and other nationals in need of international protection, returned forcibly to Turkey in contravention of obligations under the Refugee Convention. The essential commitment of signatories to the Refugee Convention is that of *non-refoulement*, the agreement not to return someone to the borders of a state where they may be at risk of persecution.”

Leonie Kerins, CEO of Doras Luimní, went onto say “We should not be entering into any agreement which would undermine the integrity of the state to uphold the rule of law. Instead we should be actively seeking ways to increase our support for refugees and those countries which are carrying the greatest responsibility at this time. That includes a much greater emphasis on relocating and resettling refugees in Ireland and being much more open about the way in which refugees are being accommodated around the country.”

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Contact Details:

- Caroline Reid, Communications Officer IRC, Tel: 085 8585510, Email: caroline@irishrefugeecouncil.ie
- Aideen Roche, Communications Officer Doras Luimní, Tel: 087 9953652, Email: a.roche@dorasluimni.org

Notes

- Ireland agreed to take part in the EU Agenda for Migration in response to unprecedented numbers of refugees entering the EU in 2015. The decision was to take 4000 asylum seekers/ refugees (asylum seekers from Italy and Greece and refugees from Lebanon and Jordan) over a two year period. To date only one family has been relocated from Greece and just over 200 refugees from Jordan and Lebanon. These are dealt with under the [Irish Refugee Protection Programme](#) set up by the Government in September 2015.
- Ireland's initial commitment to contribute funds to Turkey is summed up in a [Statement by the Taoiseach, 16 December 2015](#)
- The European Council discussions last week are summed up in a [Statement by EU Heads of State or government on conclusion of the European Council meeting with the Turkish Prime Minister, 7 March 2016](#)