



18th June 2022

Human Rights Defenders on Samos call for Frontex to suspend operations in Greece

Human rights defenders on Samos are demanding the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, also known as Frontex, terminate its operations on the Greek island of Samos. This comes after mounting evidence that Greek authorities and Frontex are violating international law by illegally pushing back to Turkey people seeking sanctuary. The civil society groups are demanding Aija Kalnaja, the ad interim Executive Director of Frontex, trigger Article 46 of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 and take steps to terminate Frontex's operations in Samos and Greece.

The Samos Advocacy Collective, a collaborative group of human rights defenders advocating for fair and dignified migration policies says:

There is overwhelming evidence that Frontex is complicit, if not directly involved, with the illegal practices of pushbacks, collective expulsion, torture and murder. Frontex's presence on the island does not ensure that people are able to claim their right to seek asylum, instead the agency turns a blind eye and funds the consistent violation of human rights happening at the borders of Europe.

This call comes days after the EU LIBE Frontex Scrutiny Working Group also placed pressure on Ms Kalnaja to trigger Article 46. Triggering this article would require Frontex to withdraw the financing or suspend/terminate any activity by the Agency in a Member State where violations of fundamental rights or international protection obligations are of a serious nature or are likely to persist.

Ms Kalnaja's stated to the LIBE Working Group that it is her "feeling" that Frontex's presence "is conducive to better compliance with Fundamental Rights". Human rights organisations strongly dispute this statement, pointing to the mounting evidence of pushbacks from Samos and Frontex's involvement in human rights abuses. They call for Frontex to leave the island. This call follows the Border Violence Monitoring Network writing a similar letter of concern relating to human rights abuses in the Evros region just two weeks ago.

I HAVE RIGHTS, a legal organisation on Samos and one of the signatory organisations to the letter explains:

In the last two years alone, evidence suggests that the Greek authorities carried out 1,018 deportations in the Aegean Sea, with Samos seeing the 2nd highest rates of sea pushbacks in the region.¹ Despite Ms Kalnaja's claims, we have seen no evidence of Frontex's presence protecting people who are seeking safety. It is high time for Frontex to stop its material support to the Greek authorities whose mass human rights abuses during pushbacks include torture, murder, and enforced disappearances.

Read the full open letter here:

ENDS.

Further comments available.

¹ Forensic Architecture "Drift-backs in the Aegean Sea"
<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drift-backs-in-the-aegean-sea>

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RIGHTS.**



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MUST
ACT.**



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Human Rights Legal Project

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Key Links

Border Violence Monitoring Network. July 2022. "Letter of concern to Fronext over fundamental rights violations in Evros"

<https://www.borderviolence.eu/letter-of-concern-to-frontex-2/>

Forensic Architecture. July 2022. "Drift-backs in the Aegean Sea"

<https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drift-backs-in-the-aegean-sea>