European Justice & Home Affairs Ministers; *via email*

Brussels, 11 September 2015

Dear Ministers,

The best and worst of Europe

In the face of the current humanitarian crisis affecting people fleeing war, persecution and poverty, EPAM, Social Platform and CONCORD Europe – the three largest coalitions of European NGOs working on development, social rights, asylum and migration – have come together to call on Member State governments and ministers to create a more welcoming Europe.

Many of our national members, churches and faith communities as well as ordinary citizens have demonstrated the best of Europe's values through acts of solidarity such as the provision of services and humanitarian aid. The need for these services will only increase as the crisis continues, and it is vital that organisations and citizens are not criminalised for such acts as they currently are in some Member States.

At the same time the crisis has brought out the worst in Europe, with xenophobic rhetoric and violence against refugees and migrants on the rise. Rather than a lack of capacity and resources for managing the humanitarian crisis, Member States are lacking political will.

During his State of the Union address on 9 September, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker presented his second implementation package following the European Agenda on Migration. Taking this into consideration, we propose the following measures to be prioritised:

1) We welcome the call for higher numbers for relocation and the move to a permanent system, and hope all Member States will contribute to meet the needs of today and prepare for tomorrow. Now the discussion must turn to a rapid start to relocation within days, not weeks or months. To make relocation a viable alternative to irregular movement and a durable solution for integration, applicants will need to receive clear information, a rapid decision and a matching based on their individual links, background or preferences.

2) All EU Member States without exception can and must offer better quality reception conditions that ensure the dignity of refugees and migrants, and more efficient asylum procedures to meet common EU standards. The EU needs a uniform response to the humanitarian crisis – particularly for Syrian refugees – a higher target for resettlement matching the needs identified by UNHCR, a reallocation of funds (AMIF) towards future reception and processing needs, and a new approach to the rights, mobility and effective integration support for beneficiaries of international protection.

3) This crisis, like others, will continue as long as we fail to address the root causes, such as war, climate change and poverty. The EU must put human rights, peace and opportunity first in its neighbourhood and international policy. The Commission's shift to a diplomatic offensive and its continued commitment to greater policy coherence will help make these countries more just and safe, and make future migration to Europe more orderly and voluntary.

4) We expect Member States to put forward concrete proposals to revise and open new regular channels for migration. Such proposals must go beyond the Blue Card and high-skilled labour migration and include humanitarian and family sponsorship schemes for protection, sufficient channels to meet labour market needs in lower-skilled sectors as well as the laws and administrative capacity to facilitate family reunification.

As the link between citizens and decision-makers, civil society is in a unique position to contribute to the development of the EU's response to this crisis. We remain at your disposal following your discussions and decisions on 14 September.

Yours sincerely,

European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration (EPAM)
The meeting-place of European NGOs and networks seeking to contribute to the development of asylum and migration policy in the EU

Social Platform
The largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe

CONCORD Europe
The European NGO confederation for relief and development