

# Statement: Stop inhumane policies against migrants!

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**Children separated from their families and caged in Trump's USA, thousands drowning as they cross the Mediterranean, boats transporting migrants refused the right to dock by Salvini's Italy, Orban's Hungary declaring that helping refugees is a crime, 370 thousand Rohingya fleeing from to Bangladesh after another military raid and massacres by Myanmar government, tens of thousands of economic refugees from Haiti and Venezuela spreading throughout South American countries, more than five million Syrian refugees outside the country and even more internally displaced ....**

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Those who hold power in Old Europe and the Americas are joined in a holy witch hunt against the spectre of "migrants": a wide ranging alliance embracing the populists of the right and what remains of the traditional Social Democrats. Salvini and Macron, Putin and Trump - chauvinists from the east and the west, French liberals and German police...

## The escalation of inhumanity

Trump's new attack on migrants from Mexico, Central America and other parts of the world seeking to enter the United States, has reached a shocking level of inhumanity. In recent weeks, especially in June, thousands of cases of children separated from their parents attempting to cross the border between Mexico and the United States through the implementation of the Zero Tolerance policy were made public. Thousands of children were put in cages, like animals, and then placed in detention centres in different and distant cities from the border points where their migrant parents were detained.

The protests, internationally but also very significantly within the United States, forced Trump to sign an executive order to stop this separation of children and parents. However, the period for reuniting these families has expired and thousands of children are still separated from their parents, some of whom were deported during this period, while others have not been located and identified.

Even though Trump has signed the executive order to reunite separated parents and children (which has not yet happened), he has also reaffirmed the continuation of the "Zero Tolerance" policy in immigration - now entire families, even with children, will be locked up in detention centres before the outcome of a legal process,, when they have already suffered extreme violence in their home country or on the road.

The torment for the migrants coming not only from Mexico and Central America, but also from countries further, such as Brazil, Haiti or even African countries, does not begin just when they cross the border into the United States, but all along the way there. Especially serious is the situation for migrants passing through Mexico as they are subjected to extortion, theft of their scarce resources or kidnapped by criminal gangs to subject women to prostitution and men as hired killers or drug traffickers, if they are not killed on the road. From countries such as El Salvador, humanitarian caravans are being organized to travel through Mexico looking for relatives who have disappeared on the way to Mexico's border with the United States.

Between 2014 and 2017 at the south of Europe, more than 16,000 men, women and children died while seeking to cross the Mediterranean. On average, about 1 in 1,000 people trying to cross. In 2018 more than one in 50 people! Since January 2018, with the tightening of the closure of the maritime borders, 1,100 migrants have died by drowning. And at the same time the drama worsens upstream, in the desert or on the Libyan coast, and downstream, in the Alpine passes or in Calais.

These deaths are all crimes caused by racist policies towards migrants. And it is not only Salvini who has banned their arrival on the Italian coast. All European governments singing the same tune.

In Brussels, on 29 June, the leaders of the European Union unified by tightening their policy, obstructing the action humanitarian associations' boats and seeking to externalize the detention camps outside Europe, in North Africa or they Middle East: they assume the use of migrants as "scapegoats" for their crisis.

### **An ideological offensive articulated with reactionary policies**

Mass media and mainstream politicians argue that the problems of hundreds of millions of people in Europe and North America - economic and employment difficulties, individual and social security, environmental living conditions - have a single obvious cause - the migrants that come from the global south. They ignore in so doing the vast movements of migrants between the countries of the global south, two thirds of overall migration. The numbers arriving in the North - representing there between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent of the population - could easily be assimilated. Compare this with Lebanon, for example, which with a population of around five million (including hundreds of thousands of Palestinians) has taken in more than a million Syrian refugees alone.

They argue that if wages are going down and unemployment up, this is explained away by the competitive pressures of migrants coming unregulated and illegally to the North. If there is not enough social housing at affordable prices, this is supposedly due to the demographic pressure of migrants in cities where they live in unacceptable conditions, lowering the living standards to which "our civilisation" is used. If crime is on the increase or if the feeling of insecurity and fear of terrorism is rising, then it is obviously the fault of migrants, particularly those coming from Arab countries or those with a large Islamic population.

There are many other examples of this type of argument. Everything else disappears into thin air once the "migrant emergency" is mentioned:

- the economic crisis that has already lasted ten years;
- the big increase in profits while wages have declined as a share of national income;
- the role of the multinationals - particularly those that are mainly American-, European- or Chinese-owned - in plundering the resources of the South (Africa above all);

- the crippling repayments of the (often illegitimate) foreign debt and the structural adjustment and austerity programmes imposed by the major international financial institutions;
- the environmental crisis and climate disasters caused by the level of consumption in the North and the unsustainable model of capitalist development now present in every corner of the planet;
- the continuing endemic armed conflicts in the South (particularly the Middle East and central Asia) where intervention by imperialist and regional powers is wreaking havoc and there is no shortage of arms, most of them produced by the countries which close their borders to migrants and refugees.

All these processes - engendered by the capitalist system itself - are in reality the principal reason, both for the social crisis in the whole world, and for the current wave of migration, but they evaporate in the dominant narrative and there is an ideological poisoning.

The European and US governments have forcefully chosen to close their borders and to control migration from outside their territory. They use willing governments in the South (such as in Turkey, Libya and Morocco) to externalise their borders and provide millions of dollars or euros for them to do the dirty work and deal with the refugees and migrants who might try to enter the European Union.

These policies are often justified as being an "antidote" to the possible growth of racism or by the supposed need to "regulate" migration.

Political and cultural positions which accept more open borders (albeit in a "regulated" way) because "we need them" to do jobs that are otherwise hard to fill from the "national" population, or to pay the pensions of an ageing society do not fundamentally break with the pattern of exploitation of humans.

### **Exploitation, segregation, racism**

As often in the past, migrants suffer a double exploitation, especially in some "exemplary" sectors like agriculture, logistics or social care. Migrants' extreme vulnerability and social marginalisation facilitate their brutal exploitation in the labour market, which maximises the profits of small, medium and big national and multinational companies. Migrants find work through networks involving both entirely unregistered recruitment through illegal gangmasters and hyper-precarious contracts.

This migrant exploitation circuit is not a parallel network to the way in which "native" workers are treated. Indeed, the exploitation of migrants functions precisely because it is closely connected to the structures of general exploitation. The roles of workers (both migrants and "natives") are connected and reciprocally determined.

In this context, borders and immigration laws act as filters -allowing in mostly young and healthy workers, or those with special skills, while ensuring they lack the rights to defend themselves adequately against super-exploitation. They also provide spectacular images of hundreds of people crammed into unsafe boats or scaling high fences that are then interpreted as "avalanches" or "invasions".

Although the neo-liberal project aims to completely dismantle any legal or social regulations favouring working people, the racist hierarchy which structures the labour market means that some minor elementary supportive regulations are still for the moment maintained for "native" workers.

The latter directly or indirectly benefit from the hyper-exploitation of migrants, usually, though not always, without even being aware of it (just as with the gender structuring of the labour market).

Alongside this exploitative structure there is also segregation – such as:

- the “temporary” detention centres (inside and outside the European Union, the USA and Australia);
- the isolated, largely invisible, places where migrants work and live in the countryside with thousands of farm labourers living in appalling conditions;
- the racist segregation of whole neighbourhoods in the cities; marginalised and criminalised.

Within this segregation there is a whole range of legal and social situations which tend to be lumped together under the general term of “migrant”: undocumented workers, asylum seekers, refugees with humanitarian or international protection, immigrants with labour permits, the children and grandchildren of migrants. This makes up a hierarchy of conditions in which the question of their rights is totally eliminated and where they are divided between those who have some “privileges” (documents for example) and those who do not.

The reality of the social, material and cultural conditions of migrants in the countries of the North has also seen a growth in racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. In recent years these extremely dangerous phenomena have taken on specific political forms that today threaten to become socially hegemonic and inform the policies of governments within the G7 (already in the USA and Italy, increasingly in France, Germany and Britain). Here we are talking about distinct organisations that have all been incorrectly dubbed as “populist”. However, they do have a common trait – they seek popular support by developing a narrative according to which migrants are the consequence of a policy pursued by a “global political/economic elite” with disastrous consequences for the “native” populations who are paying the “cost”.

These organisations are often close to neo-fascism, with attacks on individual migrants and entire communities - the cyclical re-emergence of anti-Roma campaigns is an example.

Faced with this situation, those governments who define themselves as liberal cannot and will not really do anything to make it better. They are incapable of responding with policies of open borders or guarantees of peoples’ rights. These governments are responsible for destroying the welfare state and are the main allies of the multinationals and the financial centres that are the main causes of the economic crisis. They have not put in place any real projects to welcome or provide asylum for those wishing to come to Europe or the USA.

Anti-capitalist alternative and social and political solidarity with migrants The only effective response is to refuse to consider migration as a “problem”, but to meet the social needs of millions of women and men, migrants and “natives”. We demand that the richest countries are host countries, as are the other countries of the world. The organisations and activists of the Fourth International seek to play an important role in building such a response. In many cases they are already involved in the front line of the anti-fascist, anti-racist battles, and in support of migrants. This work should be focused around the following fundamental points:

- We demand the right to migrate: freedom of movement and settlement. As internationalists we believe it is a fundamental right of every person to be able to live with dignity and enjoy all the political and social rights of the country where they reside. At the same time, migration must be a freely chosen option. However, millions of people are forced to migrate to escape misery, poverty,

war, environmental disasters, the lack of prospects and so on. They should all have full rights, including, but not limited to, the right to asylum for those fleeing war and persecution. We reject the division between so-called “economic” migrants and refugees.

This is the priority in every country – especially those where there is greatest repression of migrants – and all left organisations should fight for the granting of full rights to all migrants, with particular attention to those, such as women, racialised people, LGBTI individuals, Muslims and minors, suffering from other forms of discrimination and oppression.

- We seek to build anti-racist and anti-fascist movements, not only as part of a cultural battle, but also as a political mobilisation against the agents of both institutional and social racism. The cultural and political aspects of this struggle are inseparable. In order to counter discriminatory and racist ideology, work on the cultural and educational levels is vital. But it is also crucial to take up the social struggles to regain rights and power for working people making visible in practice the connection between racism and the workings of capitalism.
- We support migrants’ self-organisation and struggles, starting from their specificity and particular demands, but looking to make the necessary links to questions of class, gender and racist discrimination and showing how this is a single interconnected process.
- We take on board the experiences of mutualism between the exploited and discriminated and their common struggles – either through building social and trade union struggles including workers of every type or through collective projects such as self-managed housing schemes, labour cooperatives, solidarity associations and informal mutual economic and social aid groups.
- As internationalists we consider that freely chosen migration and the mixing of populations is of positive benefit to societies. Building links between popular and social movements in the countries from which migrants come and those where they settle is a vital part of developing movements of resistance to capitalism and indicating the possibilities of a new world based on solidarity and mutual aid.

**Fourth International Bureau**, Wednesday 25 July 2018

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## **P.S.**

- <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5621>

- Fourth International Bureau

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