

Red Cross says Europe has obligation to accept and protect refugees



Valencia, June 18 (RHC)-- The International Red Cross has called on members of the European Union to accept and protect refugees "according to international law for refugees but also according to the principles of humanity."

Elhadj As Sy of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said Sunday that Europe had a duty to follow Spain's example of welcoming a rejected refugee boat based on the very humanitarian values that it promotes.

The comments came after Spanish authorities announced that they would take in Aquarius, a rescue boat carrying 630 refugees which had been left stranded in high seas for more than a week after Italian and Maltese governments refused to accept them.

A team of more than 2,000 people, including 470 translators and 1,000 Red Cross volunteers, were present at the ceremony to welcome the boat in the Spanish port of Valencia on Sunday.

As Sy, himself in Valencia, hailed Spain for opening "its arms at a time when many reject [refugees] and are not showing solidarity." He said the decision by new Spanish Prime minister Pedro Sanchez to

accept Aquarius should set an example for other European countries to consider their humanitarian commitments regarding refugees.

"Those are values that Europe is promoting. And we also expect from Europe to put those values into practice like we are seeing here today," said As Sy, adding: "We call on all other countries to follow suit in helping those in need in the name of the one fundamental principle, which is one humanity which we all share."

Over the past three years, the EU members have been divided on how the bloc should handle a historic flow of refugees arriving from countries hit by war and poverty in Africa and in the Middle East. Governments in eastern Europe are especially angry at an EU scheme for relocation of refugees based on quotas while others like Italy and Germany are trying to fend off more arrivals due to increasing anti-refugees sentiments among their publics.

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