

## « The possibility to seek asylum at the embassy saved my life »

**Brussels, 20 September 2011.** «I wouldn't have been able to travel to Switzerland on my own. The possibility to seek asylum at the Swiss embassy saved my life», said a Somali refugee who was able to leave Libya thanks to the entry visa issued by Swiss authorities.

Around 200 persons were allowed to travel from North Africa to Switzerland this Spring through the [Swiss asylum procedure from abroad](#), currently the only one of its kind among European countries.

While the European borders are increasingly tight, this is one of the very few channels for people fleeing persecution to reach the European Union in a legal and safe manner. Most people have no choice but to risk their lives in order to try to reach safety. [More than 1,000 people](#) are thought to have perished in the Mediterranean since January 2011. Those that do not die en route are often [subject to acts of horrific violence and human rights abuses](#).

[In the conference](#) organised by ECRE and the Italian Council for Refugees (CIR), representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, UNHCR and civil society have re-launched the debate on the potential of complementary forms of access to protection in Europe.

At the same time, participants have also underlined that such procedures cannot replace or restrict spontaneous arrivals of asylum seekers to the European territory.

Currently, European legislation does not envisage channels for access to protection in Europe from abroad. However, visas for protection could be one of the tools to avoid the loss of lives and provide refugees with an alternative to place themselves in the hands of smugglers in their attempt to reach protection.

Speaking at the conference, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström also highlighted the potential of visas for protection and the importance of [resettlement](#) as a durable solution for those refugees who cannot find protection in the country they had fled to.

### **Notes for editors**

The [European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#) is a pan-European Alliance of 68 organisations in 30 countries, established to promote the rights of those who seek international protection in Europe

The [Italian Council for Refugees](#) is an independent, humanitarian, no-profit organisation, founded in 1990 under the patronage of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. CIR works with the aim to empower and co-ordinate actions in defence of refugees and asylum seekers' rights in Italy. CIR is a member of ECRE.

ECRE, Asylkoordination, CEAR, the Greek Council for Refugees, Kisa, the People for Change Foundation, Associazione Culturale Acuarinto and Fondazione Iniziative e Studi Sulla Multietnicita ISMU are partners of the 'Exploring Avenues for Protected Entry in Europe' project, lead by the Italian Council for Refugees.

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