***Unwarranted and cruel – the Greek police quarantine of Moria camp on Lesvos***

The Greek Government is enforcing an ill-considered and potentially very damaging and harmful quarantine on Moria camp for migrants and asylum seekers on the island of Lesvos. This sort of mass quarantine is dangerous and must be avoided at all cost. Above all, such restrictive measures can never be a fig leaf to cover up a lack of comprehensive strategy to reduce transmission in the camp and protect what is left of peoples’ dignity.

The numbers of COVID-19 confirmed cases among non-migrant residents of the island has been rising lately, but there is to this day only one confirmed case of COVID-19 among residents of Moria camp. The government’s duty of care requires them to boost the public health response for the asylum seekers of Moria, not to imprison them in their hellish conditions as a way of pretending to protect the island from the spread of the virus.

Moria is not safe for anyone, but there are over 200 identified and named individuals whose age and underlying health conditions put them at serious risk from COVID-19. For months we and other actors have been calling for the total evacuation of all the residents of Moria camp, with a specific urgency to move these particularly medically vulnerable people to safe accommodation on Lesvos, the mainland or other EU states. In April, the Government promised such an evacuation from the islands - but five months later these people are still trapped, and now contained by a police cordon. With a positive case confirmed in Moria, it is essential that these people are moved from the camp to safe accommodation now. To not do so would be a clear dereliction of the Greek authorities’ duty of care.

*“**Apparently the local health authorities have started testing the residents of the camp for COVID-19, but that is a fraction of what needs to be done,”* says Caroline Willemen, Field Coordinator for COVID-19 on Lesvos. *“A proper public health response is what is needed; well-planned, with contact-tracing as well as testing, a serious boost to hygiene conditions and healthcare services that are easily accessible. We cannot see the justification of the enforced mass quarantine and what’s worse; we know these measures will worsen our patients’ already deteriorating mental health.*

*“Right now in Moria there are elderly people with underlying health conditions, pregnant women, as well as children who are afraid and are being exposed to more trauma as a result of this policy. The government should be protecting these people, but instead by keeping them hemmed in with COVID in the camp, they are exposing them.”*

Anyone engaged in public health knows that a comprehensive approach is needed rather than quarantine, particularly when COVID-19 is evidently already circulating outside of the camp. We know what makes a public health response during outbreaks successful:

* not resorting to damaging measures such as policing and detention, but instead
* ensuring proper information and collaboration of the community
* ensuring basic hygiene measures are as accessible as possible for all
* evacuation and shielding of people who are at heightened medical risk
* mass testing
* isolation and treatment of the positive cases
* contact tracing
* quarantine only in places where minimum standards are in place and where medical follow-up can be ensured

The authorities’ reaction so far has been one public health measure (reportedly starting testing in the camp) and one unnecessary enforcement of a mass quarantine lockdown. If the Greek government is going to be accountable for its duty of care, it needs to urgently implement the other public health measures – or entirely evacuate all in Moria to safer places – rather than rely on a mass quarantine that will inevitably cause additional suffering while bringing absolutely no public health benefits to anyone.