

## **Reaction to announcement to close PIKPA camp**

### **PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Mytilini, 03/07/2018 - Lesvos Solidarity reacts to the reports regarding the announcement by the Region of North Aegean to close down the open, self-organised space of PIKPA in Neapoli due to the report by the Hygiene Service, which considers it dangerous to public health and the environment.

Firstly, we would like to stress that Lesvos Solidarity is proud to offer support to the guests of this open, self-organized space of PIKPA together with other organisations, groups and volunteers who have been doing so since 2012, when the space started to be used for the needs of the refugee population. Our common efforts have turned PIKPA into an example of solidarity, known around the world, internationally recognized and even awarded.

We also want to clarify that Lesvos Solidarity has its headquarters at Mosaik Support Centre. The main activity of the organisation is to support the refugee and local population at Mosaik; and wherever support is needed.

No ownership - either written or verbally - has been given to Lesvos Solidarity by any authority, which would allow the Region of North Aegean or the Public Health Service to refer to our organisation as the manager or the coordinator of the space.

The problems with the broken net in the food distribution area, the leak in a water tank for the laundry machines and the deficiencies in the common kitchen area, where the refugees cook their own food, have already been addressed by the groups and volunteers who support PIKPA and they have been fixed.

The intervention of the Hygiene Service raises serious questions with regards to the extreme severity shown towards PIKPA in contrast to the tolerance towards the hygiene conditions in the Moria hotspot, which are reported daily by locals, institutions, residents, organisations and by the local, national and international press. What kind of investigation has been carried out by the Hygiene Service in the Moria hotspot and what kind of measures have been taken by the responsible authorities and the Region?

Moreover, the Hygiene Service inspected PIKPA in a period when 1000 Kurdish refugees had left Moria camp after fighting broke out. 350 of them ended up in PIKPA camp and the groups supporting PIKPA made a huge effort to give them temporary shelter for three weeks in order to avoid their stay in parks and beaches in town.

It is to be noted that those refugees created no problems in the space of PIKPA neither when it comes to the hygiene conditions nor to the environment or the safety of the area. On the contrary, their stay in parks and public spaces would have put them in danger and would have potentially caused tensions with parts of the local community.

We are puzzled by the fact that the Hygiene Service - although it was aware of the emergency situation in the island those days - refers to the 350 Kurdish refugees and refers to “crowded living accommodation” in PIKPA, whereas there is no reference or report about the exposure of these people to the dangers and extreme overcrowding in Moria hotspot, particularly after the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal which has trapped thousands of people in our island.

We also find it striking that the Region of North Aegean and the local authorities act against the only informal shelter that offers dignified solutions all these years, instead of acknowledging the support offered by groups in PIKPA and their immediate and effective response to the recent emergency.

Moreover, as soon as the temporary emergency with the Kurdish refugees in PIKPA camp started, this extraordinary situation has been used against PIKPA camp. Apart from sending several inspection services to the camp in this period, a court case was launched by several hotel owners from the neighbourhood and a few individuals, which will be heard on 6 July. For all these reasons, we consider this decision to close PIKPA camp a political move by certain actors who are opposing the model of solidarity that PIKPA camp represents.

Lesvos Solidarity - among many other groups and thousands of volunteers - has contributed to the maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure and hygiene conditions in the space of former PIKPA. It has helped and supported the PEDI of Lesvos with machines and materials, as well as the hospital, and has played a key role in the installation of a special refrigerator in the morgue of Vostanio Hospital of Mytilene, contributing to the protection of the public health and preserving the dignity of each person in our island.

We are calling on the Region of North Aegean to reconsider their decision while showing respect to the dignified shelters in the island and the dramatic situation in Moria camp, and to take a position on what is happening in Moria camp concerning the protection of public health, security and the environment. We also invite the Region to respect the work and the efforts of thousands of people that created and maintain PIKPA as an international symbol of solidarity.

Since the announcement of the closure went public we have received numerous messages of support from international, national and local organisations, institutions and groups and from citizens from all over the world.

We declare as active citizens that we support the efforts in PIKPA and that we will keep going, since nowadays places of solidarity and spaces of dignified shelter are more important than ever.

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