

Mytilini 30/8/2014

Ζωή όχι Θάνατος
Life not death

29th of August 2014 morning. We get the information that there is a rescue operation in Nees Kydonies Lesvou. A woman of 38 years is missing. Strong winds in the area. The coast guard boat are not sailing only a helicopter flies for a while over the area, where the accident happened. At noon 25 Afghan refugees are arriving in PIKPA. Two dingy boats had arrived. Strong winds and waves can't stop smugglers but also can't stop the need of the people to escape war. Among the survivors of the first boat there is a five years old girl with her uncle. Her mother is missing. The child is having some rest in PIKP but it's overcrowded again. More than 150 people had arrived yesterday. No bed available and the families who are taking care of the girl give her their own beds. We inform the "Doctors of the world" in the Moria detention camp about the tragic incident as well as Red cross international.

The child has a sister and her father in Belgium and they talk on the phone when the child is transferred in Moria to be examined and supported by the doctors. Unfortunately "Doctors of the world" are not offering support in PIKPA open reception camp. They are insisting on operating only the detention camp of Moria. The doctors confirm that the child knows very well that the mother is missing. She heard her screaming her name twice and after that couldn't hear her anymore. As the time passes we make sure that the girl would not be detained in Moria (as it is the case for many shipwreck victims) and that police will transfer her back to PIKPA.

In PIKPA we are all shocked: The survivors are describing that the boat with the 13 people capsized 30 minutes after they had left Aivalik coast. It was shortly after midnight and the uncle of the child together with another man tried to save the child. The woman was taken very quickly by the waves. Some men who could swim managed to turn the boat and 12 of them were back in the small dingy boat. Strong waves led them in Nees Kydonies Lesvou after many hours. When coastguards took them out of the sea they declared the missing woman. Faces are dark in PIKPA - we have experienced these tragedies before. We all feel exhausted by sorrow.

Later that afternoon we get an unexpected information. A woman was found walking alone in the area near Xambelia. She was taken to the hospital where immediately goes the interpreter who was supporting us in PIKPA. The woman is under a strong shock. She is convinced that her child and son-in-law are dead in the sea. She was fighting with the waves 18 hours. She was wearing a bad quality life vest that at one point became very heavy. She didn't know how to swim and she was scared by the sea. Once in the coast of Lesvos she finds an orange life jacket and she believes that this was her daughter's life jacket and starts screaming in despair. She managed to arrive barefoot to the nearest houses to the coast.

When the interpreter very carefully announced her that the child is alive and waiting for her outside she refused to believe him. It took long time and calm discussion with the interpreter to overcome the shock and be able to meet her child. The moment of the meeting is something that nobody can describe. A real life present.

Mytilini Hospital really supported the woman. Together with the interpreter (it sounds very normal but interpretation in Greek Hospitals for refugees is another big gap) the doctors did all the tests and decided to keep her for one day to be sure that she will overcome the shock physically and psychologically.

The child and the son-in-law went back to PIKPA where the woman would be transferred today. In PIKPA, she will recover and get all the information and support about the family reunification procedure as her husband and eldest daughter are in Belgium.

We asked UNHCR to insist in this case , on the 6 months protection from deportation order that is offered to the victims of shipwrecks. We also demanded the survivors of the shipwrecks not to be detained in Moria detention place.

We experienced a real miracle of life this time after so many deaths. But we scream that the life of refugees should not depend on miracles. A woman who flees war with her little child and who has part of her family in Belgium should never risk her life in the sea.

We need to change this lethal border regime immediately. Our cost is a coast of life and not a cost of death!

Efi Latsoudi
member of “the village of all together”-Lesvos