



# I focus

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# Charity begins where it is most needed!

As our jingoistic sentiments secrete from every corner of these Islands, 20 reflections come to mind;

- Alan Kurdi, not that I had any doubt, died for nothing. Much as this sounds terrible, notwithstanding the hubbub, nothing has changed from September 2015 when we saw that little body splattered face down on a beach. On a humanitarian and political level the world has failed big time.
- 5 years ago everyone including our religious and political leaders were mourning 24 of the estimated 800 or so people who had just drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. The impressionable appearance of those coffins all spread out under the tent after being carried on the shoulders of our soldiers is an image that cannot be forgotten. Yet, nothing has changed since then – people still drown, we might shed the occasional tear, but it takes a few moments to forget and we carry on as if nothing had happened.
- People have been made to believe that NGOs are in sync with the traffickers. Maybe what we fail to say is that NGOs were around for much less time than the trafficking that has been affecting the Mediterranean for decades. Correlating an increase of boats to the involvement of NGOs is in my opinion a long shot.
- We've had politicians saying that Malta closed its ports because its resources are taken up on controlling the COVID-19 pandemic - and monitoring our hunters and beaches and public places because of the self centered individuals that roam around.
- We haven't even started intervening with our communities, like Marsa, Birzebbuga, Bugibba and Hamrun, on a programme around town planning and community development. No wonder people who live in these communities struggle so much – they are left to their devices, except for the occasional extra police patrol and the sporadic NGO initiative.
- We've had senior politicians having a go at NGOs who are out and about trying to save souls. It starts getting confusing when these same people



speak about NGO rescue ships as having a vital role to play. Mind boggling!

- Of course we have racists in our society but that doesn't mean that every dissenting voice expressing fear and anxiety is bigoted. Nonetheless, this fear needs to be addressed because it provides the firewood for xenophobes and racists to take advantage in this briny of misperception.
- A number of medics said that the argument around safeguarding peoples' public health is an incongruity if we leave people stranded to their own devices in the middle of a raging sea.
- The EU has let us down big time. We need a plan that works in times of crisis and not expect that in times of calamity we come up with a plan. The issue around burden sharing has been raised repeatedly and ad nauseam. Our MEPs and all civil servants in Brussels need to come up with a strategy that will not only bring burden sharing on the agenda but come up with tangible solutions. Our diplomats are known for their knack, let's use it.
- In the present circumstances it is infinitely clear that the focus on Europe and the focus of its 27 member states is simply that of looking after their own 'personal' interests. Unless we have a Union that really federates and takes cognizance and

**Charity needs to start from wherever it is needed most**

- make 'its own' the problems of each individual member state – we will continue to struggle.
- We lack inspirational community leaders', ones that don't; evoke sinking of NGO ships and don't preach exclusion from the pulpit and choose to share a podium with far-right groups and those proposing isolating foreign students in schools and those talking about placing the burden on doctors to choose who to treat on the grounds of race and those incompetent pseudo-journalists running around like headless chickens trying to rake in some views with their dramatized 'footage'. We have too many people who talk 'Left' and 'Church' in the morning and as soon as they find themselves in front of a screen forget all about the responsibility that such values carry and hence opt for populism.
- As I write, people suffer from

dehydration and high seas and are unable to process the endless fears that encapsulate them. To really know what is happening, it would be best to get hold of some narratives of people who just about made it. Seeing these individuals as people rather than commodities or objects is a good place to start from and might help us change the way we think about migrants who in their scores are fleeing from misfortunes and calamities.

- 'Push back' is a violation of all that is human and should not take place directly or indirectly and as a country we should shy away from even considering being part of such a strategy.
- We are obliged by international maritime law to save people in our SAR. There is no beating around the bush with this, it is what we would want if a Maltese registered ship is in trouble or if Maltese people on a boat are in danger.
- It is a well-known fact that the situation in Libya is at an all-time low. Stories of people who have managed to slip out from that pandemonium narrate about the atrocities that are happening. Returning people to such a place is probably worse than death.
- Throwing around numbers of how many people are ready to leave from Libya hoping to be accepted in Europe is not based on evidence. We need

data which is empirically collected by reputable agencies to make sure we are on the right track and can plan accordingly.

- Most people feel they have a god-given right to deserve a better quality of life. In a subtle way they feel that they are more deserving, an embedded thinking drawn from our colonial history.
- The inconsistency of our political leaders is unbelievable. Wanting to save children and women one day reminiscent of the Titanic days (forgetting that men can also sink) and supporting a push back on another. Backing each other's policies by calling for closed ports one day and expecting that people in distress are saved the other. This is erratic politics.
- The Church over the centuries had created a hierarchy of race (which has obviously been thrown out of the window, even by the Church itself) but the legacy of that belief remains strong. The patronizing imagery of black people who need to be saved and the Muslim who is a personification of the devil all feed into the contemporary narrative. Now that the Church has grown out of this oppressive belief it is best placed to take an even stronger voice in placating this form of mentis.
- We need leadership at all levels of our community, direction that helps people process their fears and worries about all that is happening. This leadership should be morally grounded and make up for the vacuum that secularization brought about. The narrative that 'charity begins at home' is dated. Charity needs to start from wherever it is needed most. As a friend told me, whether it's the bush fires in Australia or those in the Amazon in Brazil, whether it's Covid-19 that started off in China or the climatic conditions that are changing in the Antarctic – it all affects us wherever we are. So now that we have established that the world is our home, we need a moral code that will guide us founded on the principle of survival and social wellbeing of every citizen of this world – migrants are no exception.