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## **EKD: Sea Watch confiscation meets with sharp criticism**

**“The criminalisation of sea rescues must end” – EKD Council Chair Bedford-Strohm criticises the confiscation of the Sea-Watch and the toughening of penalties planned for civilian sea rescuers in Italy**

Responding to current news about the situation of volunteers involved in civilian sea rescue operations in Italy, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), has issued the following statement:

“People in distress at sea must be given assistance. That is a legal and humanitarian obligation. In the last few years, the churches have repeatedly pointed this out with all due clarity. Now the Italian authorities have confiscated the civilian rescue ship Sea-Watch 3 and the government plans to introduce tougher laws to deal with those carrying out sea rescues: it thereby aims to prevent the saving of lives in the Mediterranean. The behaviour of the Italian interior minister contradicts everything that Christianity stands for. The criminalisation of sea rescues must end. According to the UN High Commission for Human Rights, the German government should also take a firm position towards Italy in this matter. Our thanks go to the Sea-Watch crew for their untiring efforts. Again, dozens of people’s lives have been saved.”

The EKD supports many projects to assist refugees worldwide, most of them in cooperation with churches and ecumenical bodies. Project partners include the Middle East Council of Churches, the Evangelical Church in Morocco, the Gustav Adolf agency, the Spanish Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, and German-speaking congregations abroad. In November 2015, the EKD Synod allocated a total of approx. EUR 6 million for refugee support. In addition, the EKD supports the reconnaissance aircraft “Moonbird”, operated by Sea-Watch.

[www.ekd.de/flucht](http://www.ekd.de/flucht)

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EKD Press Office