

Press release from the 5th of September 2016

Carl von Ossietzky Medal 2016

to SOS Méditerranée and the documentary photographer Kai Wiedenhöfer

**Award Ceremony on Sunday, the 4th of December 2016 at 11 p.m.
at the Heilig-Kreuz-Kirche, Zossener Str. 65, 10961 Berlin**

The Board of Trustees of the **International League for Human Rights** is announcing that the **Carl von Ossietzky Medal 2016** will be awarded to **SOS Méditerranée** and **Kai Wiedenhöfer** for their courageous Human Rights activism. "Their extraordinary commitment has raised awareness for the desperate situation many refugees face today and the circumstances that have caused the search for asylum and migration", the Board stated in their decision.

In light of the dramatic increase of migration-related emergencies at sea, the captain Klaus Vogel founded the organization SOS Méditerranée together with similarly engaged supporters from civil society to rescue shipwrecked persons in the Mediterranean Sea (www.sosmediterranee.org).

Between February and mid July 2016 the organization has rescued over 3.370 refugees at the Libyan border in the central Mediterranean Sea with their ship **MS Aquarius**. Along with a professional crew, there is a search and rescue team as well as a medical team from "Doctors Beyond Borders" on board.

The SOS Méditerranée team operates on the principle to "save, protect, accompany, and bear witness". Onboard the MS Aquarius the team provides the rescued with medical and psychological care and contacts organizations in Europe for support on land. At the same time SOS Méditerranée informs the public on their rescue missions and shares substantial information on the situation of rescued refugees with the public. They use an electronic logbook to make their voices heard.

With their rescue operations the SOS Méditerranée team sets an example for humanitarian action by civil society and has drawn attention to the fatal consequences of the rigid EU border regime resulting in 30.000 deaths at sea in 2010, the majority of which were caused in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea with insufficiently equipped ships or boats.

As much as this year's medal is an expression of gratitude and appreciation toward SOS Méditerranée's courageous rescue missions, it represents a public protest against the EU's and its Member States' violations of Universal Human Rights by sealing off its borders. With a legal entry into the EU being close to impossible, refugees fleeing from war and persecution are knowingly left to the hands of smugglers.

By engaging actively in rescue missions and supplying the public with first hand information, the SOS Méditerranée Rescue Team has shed light on the humanitarian tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea resulting from the asylum and migration policy of the EU and its Member States.

The documentary photographer Kai Wiedenhöfer who will receive the Carl von Ossietzky medal of 2016 together with SOS Méditerranée, has drawn attention to the growing numbers of refugees and their fates with his photography series and volume. His exhibition and volume "Confrontier/Borders 1989-2012" triggered public discussions on the inhumanity of borders, sealed off as a part of national exclusion and isolation schemes. Inevitably, these discussions included the cause of migration and the search for asylum as well as non-violent mechanisms to overcome injustices.

Kai Wiedenhofer's photographic work mirrors the terror and despair of systematic human rights violations caused by walls, fences, and borders. On his travels through numerous countries, he depicts walls as symbols for political arbitrariness and draws attention to the injustice of poverty, so often underestimated and overlooked.

In his current exhibition "**WARonWALL**" Kai Wiedenhofer impressively conveys how the war has affected the Syrian population. The exhibition can be viewed until the 25th of September 2016 at the so-called "West Side Gallery" on 360 meters of the Berlin wall facing the Spree. For more information visit: www.waronwall.org www.kaiwiedenhofer.com

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