



22.06.2016 - "We cried on our knees, what will we do? The people will not hide us, the mountains will not hide us. We will run to the sea". The haunting lyrics of a refugee cried above a singing chorus of his friends rung out in the auditorium of the Italian Cultural Institute last night, marking one of many hair raising and sobering moments for our audience of over 350 Cine-ONU fans.

We've seen the photos and we've read the headlines, but what is really going on in Lampedusa, the small Mediterranean island that bears the brunt of the refugee crisis? Last night Ciné-ONU took viewers behind the scenes of Europe's most topical current phenomenon at the Belgian premiere of Gianfranco Rosi's award winning 'hot-off-the-press' documentary, Fuocoammare – Fire at Sea.

Orchestrated in partnership with the [International Organization of Migration](#) (IOM) and the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) (EESC), the event highlighted the high level [UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants](#), which is set for 19 September and aims to bring countries together behind a more humane and

coordinated approach to the large movements of refugees and migrants.

The premiere was poignant for taking place a day after this year's [World Refugee Day](#) , and even more so due to the UN Secretary-General's presence at the European Development Days last week, where

[he called on countries for compassion and solidarity](#)

. Whilst in Brussels,

[Ban Ki-moon also met refugees at a soup kitchen](#)

and discussed their challenges and aspirations, before travelling onto Greece to continue his work.



Following introductions and thanks by the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, Paolo Grossi, the Italian Ambassador in Brussels, Vincenzo Grassi, and the Director of the UNRIC (United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels), Deborah Seward, guest speakers Eugenio Ambrosi from IOM and Gonçalo Lobo Xavier from EESC set the ambience with engaging speeches.

“This is not just a film” said Mr. Ambrosi, *“it is a daily reality and a question to all of us, a request, that we do not fall in to the same trap of normalising what is happening and that we maintain indignation and compassion”*. *“The situation is far from an end”*

added Mr. Lobo Xavier,

“these people need a message of hope, of a future”.

Fire at Sea gives an impartial depiction of the situation in Lampedusa, entwining two narratives: the comical routine boredom of 12-year-old Samuele, who dreams of fighting and danger, and the frequent arrivals of hundreds of desperate refugees, fleeing from such. The result is a plait of contrasting threads which when unravelled, through impactful cinematography and breathtaking scenery, portray the naked reality of a remote island so heavily reported in our news.



Over 200,000 refugees have arrived on the shores of Greece and Italy so far this year and more than 2,500 have died on route. *“Over the past two years we have become accustomed to the numbers of arrivals and deaths”*

remarked Mr. Ambrosi. Though this may be true for those living afar from the shores of Lampedusa, it seems that the same cannot be said by those involved at the scene. At least not for the doctor in Fire at Sea, whose work has become the regular examination of cadavers dragged up dehydrated from boat loads

of refugees, or the treating of kids for chemical burns caused by boat fuel.

“People say the more you see the easier it gets. After seeing so many dead, men, women, children, it doesn’t get easier”. When invited to speak at last night’s event, his response was simple: *“I am more needed here than I am there”.*

The situation, according to Mr. Ambrosi, has become *“a crisis”* only *“because of our indecision to put in place the appropriate measures”*

that will serve the core values intended for Europe by its founders:

“democracy, freedom and shared responsibility”

. The

[UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants](#)

in September presents an opportunity for the international community to work together for durable solutions in the name of such principles.

Despite the perils of crossing the sea, people will continue to do, in order to flee from violence, persecution, climate change and national disasters. As one refugee in the film states, though *“the sea is not a place to cross...It is risky in life not to take the risk, because life itself is a risk”.*

Related links

[IOM campaign #iamamigrant](#)

[2016 EESC Civil Society Prize: Migrants](#)

[Photos from the event: Flickr](#)

[UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants](#)