

UNHCR Executive Committee

67th Session

General Debate

Statement by Mr. Karl Prummer

Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN Office in Geneva

Austria aligns itself with the Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

Mr. Chair,

I would like to welcome High Commissioner Grandi and congratulate him to the seamless arrival at the helm of UNHCR. We equally thank all UNHCR's staff for their dedicated work in often difficult and dangerous operating environments.

Again this year, we remain confronted with unprecedented humanitarian challenges. In Syria, fighting has intensified again which will trigger another increase in refugees and IDPs. Syria's neighbouring countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq are hosting the overwhelming majority of the almost five million refugees who have fled the country so far. Austria greatly admires the huge efforts and generosity of those countries. My government has significantly stepped up financial aid in support of the expenses arising for Syria's neighbours. We have decided to double direct bilateral development cooperation and we have increased our main federal fund for humanitarian aid by four times.

But as refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries have started to arrive in large numbers in Europe last year, Austria has increasingly been directly affected:

Over a million people have transited through Austria to other European countries. And almost 100.000 persons did not move on, but decided to stay in Austria and applied for asylum. This means that after Sweden, Austria has the second highest number of asylum seekers per capita among the 28 EU Member States.

Since last year, Austria has invested significantly to respond to this situation. In Austria asylum seekers in need are entitled to basic care which includes accommodation, food, health care, pocket money, clothes and school material, leisure activities and social advice. My government has also increased expenses on measures for integration such as language and orientation courses for living in Austria.

However, the way, in which the refugee and migration crisis in Europe evolved last year, was untenable. European States lost control over who entered our territory; network of smugglers put the lives of thousands of refugees and migrants at risk and

motivated them to take the dangerous journey over the Mediterranean in order to exploit them. In far too many instances, not those who were most in need managed to migrate to Europe but that those who could afford to pay the smugglers.

We need to do better: We have to better manage migration and stop the irregular flow of migrants. Austria welcomes the adoption of the "New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants" by our Heads of State and Government on 19 September including the commitment for a comprehensive refugee response framework based on the principles of international cooperation and responsibility-sharing. In line with the objective of the summit hosted by President Obama on 20 September, we must extend existing legal avenues for refugees.

In addition to being the EU's second largest host country per population, Austria has responded to UNHCR's humanitarian admission and resettlement calls for Syrian refugees since 2013. By now we have pledged to admit 1.900 Syrian refugees. 1.500 persons of them have already arrived in Austria and got a permanent protection status. Just now we are starting a further program for the resettlement of further 400 Syrian refugees. As we have done in the past, this program is implemented in close cooperation with UNHCR.

Most importantly, we need to better address the root causes of displacement. One particular reason for the spike in displaced persons, is the fact that today's wars and conflicts take place in cities and urban areas. Explosive weapons used in such populated areas overwhelmingly kill and injure civilians rather than combatants. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, more than 90 per cent of the victims are civilians. Infrastructure damage to hospitals, schools or to electricity and water grids causes additional deaths and diseases; affected communities are often left with no other choice than fleeing their home cities and villages. Together with other States, Austria has jointly committed itself at the World Humanitarian Summit to tackle this contemporary challenge and to work towards an international commitment to reduce the human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Before concluding, I would like to express our satisfaction that the Executive Committee could agree this year on two conclusions on international protection.

Finally, let me assure you High Commissioner that Austria will continue to be a strong partner of UNHCR and continue to support your organisation in your precious work.

Thank you very much.