



**UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
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Item 3- General debate

**Statement of Greece
delivered by H.E. Ambassador Panayotis Stournaras
Permanent Representative of Greece
to the United Nations Office in Geneva**

(as delivered)

Thank you Chair,

Greece aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the European Union.

At the outset, we would like to thank the High Commissioner for his comprehensive presentation. He gave us a global perspective and an insight for the way ahead. We share his view that, despite the many challenges, there are opportunities that must be seized and that we must work together.

We are thankful for all the work UNHCR carries out in Greece. The High Commissioner and his staff have a first-hand experience of the extremely challenging situation we are faced with. Their assistance and guidance are much appreciated. In the context of our longstanding cooperation, we were pleased to receive last month in Greece the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

We also take this opportunity to congratulate UNHCR on seventy years of service.

Since 2015 Greece has been at the forefront of a refugee crisis affecting Europe. The government and the people of Greece have always kept their minds open to the plight of refugees. Dealing with such a demanding and challenging task, we spare no efforts to improve conditions both on the islands and the mainland.

Chair,

The effects of the recent fires that led to the total destruction of the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria, on the island of Lesbos, have been devastating.

Fortunately, thanks to the coordinated emergency response of the competent Greek Authorities, there has been no loss of life, hospitalization or disappearance. Our main concern and priority were the safety of all asylum seekers, as well as that of the staff of the Center and the local community.

The outbreak of this crisis, along with the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, resulted in a complicated situation. We had to address it promptly and efficiently. And indeed, in less than two weeks we completed the construction of a new temporary Centre to house up to ten thousand persons. All people from Moria are now living in this new temporary facility.

Greek authorities and the EU have been working closely to make the best use of all relevant instruments, including the EU funding and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, in order to provide emergency support and improve the immediate conditions for people affected by the fires in Lesbos.

We are also working with the European Commission towards establishing a taskforce to ameliorate the situation on the Greek islands in the long term. Furthermore, thanks to financial support by the European Commission, the Greek government has transferred the vast majority of unaccompanied minors from all the Reception and Identification Centers in the five Aegean islands and in Evros, to special accommodation facilities on the mainland.

We welcome the initiative launched by the German EU Presidency and the European Commission to relocate unaccompanied minors, vulnerable families and refugees.

In this framework, many EU member states have expressed their readiness to assist. This is most appreciated and welcomed, since the response to the crisis necessitates genuine solidarity and shared responsibility.

Under the ongoing relocation programme for unaccompanied children and vulnerable families, more than one thousand persons have been relocated from the Greek islands. We are truly thankful for the solidarity of our EU partners and we hope that more will follow.

We are happy to announce that Greece, under the auspices of the European Commission, will organize, at the end of November this year, a Conference on Unaccompanied Minors arriving in the front line EU Member States.

Chair,

Following the events of last March at the EU's external borders, we are mindful of the need to fight against any attempt to instrumentalise people in need for political purposes. In this vein, we would like to emphasize that misusing and abusing the asylum system is in fact putting it in danger.

Distinguished delegates,

In closing, we would like to stress the importance of the Global Compact on Refugees for the international community, in supporting, assisting and protecting refugees, through addressing root causes, resettlement and responsibility sharing. This approach should remain at the core of our global humanitarian dialogue.

I thank you.