



**European Union**

**UNHCR – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**68<sup>th</sup> Session**

**(2 – 6 October 2017)**

**General Debate – Item 3**

**Statement by H.E. Mr Peter Sørensen**

**Ambassador, Head of the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva**

**Geneva, 2 October 2017**

**– CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –**

**UNITED NATIONS**  
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**EU Statement**

*Thank you Madam Chair,*

1. I am honoured to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.
2. The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\* and Albania\*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine and Georgia align themselves with this statement.
3. We wish to thank the High Commissioner for his opening remarks. We share the concern of the High Commissioner with regard to the challenge of humanitarian crises and forced displacement, including 22.5 million refugees who are fleeing war, violence and human rights violations, including sexual and gender based violence, in search of safety and protection. Global humanitarian needs are unprecedented with more than 101 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Protracted crises and long-term displacement have become the "new normal", requiring a "New Way of Working". In this context, we commend UNHCR for its continued and dedicated engagement in complex humanitarian crises and difficult working environments and increased efforts to bring development actors on board. It is essential that the agency continues to fulfil its protection mandate for refugees and stateless persons.
4. The 2017 global humanitarian financing requirements, amounting to USD 23,7 billion, has resulted in a funding gap of USD 13,3 billion and large unmet needs. Closing the humanitarian gap requires reducing needs, mobilising additional funds through traditional or innovative mechanisms and improving the efficiency of humanitarian assistance. It will require the engagement of state and non-state development actors as well as the private sector early on in a crisis to reduce humanitarian needs and prevent protracted refugee situations. In

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\* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

line with this, we expect UNHCR to implement the changes foreseen in its Strategic Directions 2017-2021 to be effective, efficient, agile and accountable and communicate with membership and donors about its prioritisation processes. The EU and its Member States are together the biggest humanitarian donor, accounting for over half of the global humanitarian funding, and also to UNHCR for the first time.

*Madam Chair,*

5. The High Commissioner is rightly calling for an improved response to refugee issues, including in relation to large-scale influxes and in the context of mixed movements. The EU and its Member States consider that the refugee response should be guided by principles and respect for fundamental rights as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Geneva Convention on Refugees. The European Union and its Member States firmly stand behind the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants that reaffirms these principles as well as the centrality of international cooperation and solidarity to the refugee protection regime.
6. The European Union and its Member States thank UNHCR for its leadership in rolling out the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and call on all States to fully use its potential. We believe that the UNHCR Executive Committee is a useful platform that helps put collective and multilateral action into practice with a view to making the CRRF a success. We therefore welcome the special segment on CRRF in the margins of this Executive Committee. The diversity of positions expressed is a positive sign that solutions are being explored and designed, but it also indicates the timeliness of preparing for the Global Compact on Refugees to be adopted next year.
7. In that respect, we will actively contribute to the upcoming thematic consultations in October and November, as well as the Dialogue of the High Commissioner in December. It is our hope that the Global Compact on Refugees will contribute to truly comprehensive responses and solutions, based on existing international legal frameworks towards a more equitable international responsibility- and burden-sharing. The first thematic discussion on 10<sup>th</sup> July proved very fruitful and confirmed the Member States' commitment to a more equitable international burden and responsibility sharing. We emphasize the importance of an active participation to the process leading to the Global Compact on Refugees of all relevant stakeholders from all geographical regions – including all UN states, non-governmental

organizations, civil society, experts, refugees, and affected communities – which would help identify successful practices and provide the basis for the Programme of Action complementing the CRRF.

8. The EU and its member States will continue to share their experiences regarding regional burden- and responsibility-sharing, considering that the European Union is, as such, very much a regional solidarity arrangement. The EU and its Member States adopted in 2016 a new approach to forced displacement, which is development-oriented, with a focus on reducing aid-dependency and fostering self-reliance. As a result, we have significantly stepped up our assistance in order to address forced displacement situations more comprehensively. We are also working on operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus and strengthening resilience at different levels in partner countries. Our support aims to improve access to services, create employment opportunities and improve protection for both the displaced and their hosts, while targeting, protecting and supporting those most vulnerable. Empowerment of persons in vulnerable situations and actions against sexual and gender based violence, including the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based violence in Emergencies are also crucial elements in support provided. Protection of women and girls in refugee situations and economic empowerment of refugee women must be given particular attention. We closely coordinate humanitarian, development and political action to be as efficient and effective as possible while fully respecting the humanitarian principles. This also includes significant support to the roll-out of the CRRF. We are committed to continuing our strong support in order to strengthen the international refugee system.
9. At the same time, as a result of an unprecedented number of asylum seekers the recent years, significant pressure has been placed on the reception systems of many countries worldwide. We therefore welcome the priority given by UNHCR to support all States and all relevant actors in building their capacity to protect those who are in need for protection and ensure the possibility to exercise the right to seek asylum.
10. The EU and its Member States hope that the Executive Committee with the support of the EU expressed through the EU Member States represented in the Executive Committee will be able to agree a conclusion on international protection on machine readable documents for refugees and stateless persons. We wish to thank the Rapporteur and the Office for their

excellent work in that context, as well as all participants for a constructive spirit. This will be another positive sign that consensus can be found on refugee issues.

*Madam Chair,*

11. The European Union and its Member States continue to work towards reforming their Common European Asylum System. Discussions are continuing with a view to address the weaknesses demonstrated by the displacement crisis in 2015-2016 and to agree on a sustainable, efficient and humane asylum system. The reformed Common European Asylum System needs to strike the right balance between responsibility and solidarity and ensure resilience to future crises. The EU Member States already contribute to alleviating the pressure on Greece and Italy, through assistance but also through relocation of persons in need of international protection. Simultaneously, the EU Member States have considerably stepped up their resettlement efforts fuelled by the EU initiatives taken in this area, notably through the implementation of the European resettlement scheme of July 2015 and the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016. In the same spirit, the European Commission has recommended last week to resettle at least 50,000 people in need of international protection over the next two year.
  
12. The European Union and its Member States have made particular efforts to protect the most vulnerable and have recently further stepped up efforts to protect the numerous migrant children arriving in the European Union, among whom many are unaccompanied. In this respect the EU and its MS have adopted specific policy commitments on the 'Protection of children in migration' that will guide concrete action preserving migrant children's integrity and fundamental rights in Europe. Protecting children is a priority at all stages of migration, along the entire migratory route. We are committed to fully taking into account the specific situation and best interests of children, and in particular unaccompanied children, in protecting children from violence, exploitation and trafficking. We are also committed to assessing the appropriateness of all durable solutions; resettlement, integration or return, depending on the best interest of the child and fully respecting the principle of non-refoulement.

*Madam Chair,*

13. Ongoing displacement crises in the world illustrate the importance of protection in humanitarian emergencies. The current crisis of refugees from Myanmar exemplifies the need for unrestricted humanitarian access but also the importance of addressing statelessness. The mixed flows of refugees and migrants along the Central and eastern Mediterranean routes remind us of the priority of life saving measures, including the fight against sexual and gender based violence, and of the centrality of protection. They also demonstrate the need for a comprehensive approach, as well as the importance of coordination between agencies. Numerous crises around the world have become protracted and some have become forgotten.

14. The EU also recalls the 2014 UNHCR recommendation on the cessation of refugee status for refugees from Croatia displaced during the 91-95 conflict.

*Madam Chair,*

15. We encourage UNHCR to continue take part to other important discussions such as the Global Compact on Migration, the follow-up to the World Humanitarian Summit conclusions and the Grand Bargain and the UN Development System reform in the context of the 2030 Agenda. In that context, UNHCR should ensure policy consistency across the board.

16. I wish to conclude by echoing UNHCR's call for more solidarity, effective responsibility and burden sharing and enhanced international cooperation – the EU confirms its long-standing partnership with UNHCR and its continued engagement and cooperation with third countries in this regard.

*Thank you Madam Chair,*