



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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**Informal Meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council
Luxembourg, 9 July 2015**

**Remarks by António Guterres
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The majority of the 137,000 people who have arrived on the shores of Greece and Italy this year are fleeing war and persecution. In Greece, has seen the highest number of boat arrivals in the Mediterranean, the proportion of people from countries in conflict – mainly Syria – has reached 85%. This is now essentially a refugee crisis.

Yesterday, the number of registered Syrian refugees in the surrounding region passed 4 million. The fighting in Syria is worsening, and the neighbouring countries are severely affected by the crisis. Living conditions for refugees are deteriorating, as they do not yet have the right to work and humanitarian resources are shrinking. 86% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line, and we can only support one-fifth of vulnerable families with cash grants. With drastically reduced food rations across the region, refugees in Lebanon now receive a mere USD 13.50 in food assistance per month. Half of all Syrian refugee children are not going to school.

And so it is no coincidence that the largest movement into Europe is now through the Eastern Mediterranean. With the insufficient assistance provided to host countries in the region, these numbers will only keep growing.

This situation requires a collective, far-reaching and comprehensive response from the European Union – a response based on the principles of humanity, access to protection, and genuine solidarity and responsibility sharing.

First, humanity. The EU has taken a clear stance by dedicating additional resources for rescue at sea to FRONTEX, and this common commitment is making an enormous difference in preventing deaths at sea. But the peak season is still ahead of us, and the primary focus must stay on saving lives.

Second, access to protection. Allowing people in need of protection to find safety is a central tenet of the international human rights regime and embodies some of the fundamental values underpinning the European project. I therefore renew my call on

all Member States to ensure their border management measures are sensitive to the needs of people seeking asylum. This isn't a problem that can be solved with fences.

Another important aspect is the need for additional, safe and legal avenues for people to find protection in Europe. These are central to any effort to effectively address irregular movements by land or by sea. Apart from resettlement and humanitarian admission, flexible visa policies and private sponsorship schemes, such measures could also include a better application of family reunification procedures, as put forward in the European Agenda on Migration.

Which brings me to my third point, the principle of solidarity and responsibility-sharing. Although a mandatory scheme would have been more effective, the agreement to relocate 40,000 asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy is encouraging. As needs continue to grow, these measures will need to be expanded, particularly with regard to Greece, where reception capacity is severely overwhelmed with only 1,100 places available for over 68,000 arrivals by end of June.

Solidarity and responsibility-sharing also means stepping up efforts to register those who are disembarked, strengthening asylum and reception systems, and supporting countries in the immediate EU neighbourhood (notably fYRoM and Serbia) whose fragile asylum systems are unable to cope with the enormous increase in arrivals.

With regard to resettlement, I hope States will make concrete commitments towards the goal of resettling 20,000 refugees, in addition to existing quotas. This is a concrete measure of burden-sharing and a much-needed sign of support to refugee-hosting countries.

The relocation and resettlement proposals – even if modest compared with the needs – are important first steps towards a comprehensive approach to the situation in the Mediterranean. UNHCR stands ready to work together with EU Member States and institutions, as well as other partners.

An effective strategy to solving the crisis must also include stepped-up efforts to combat smuggling and trafficking, cracking down on criminal networks while providing protection safeguards for the victims.

No problem can be solved without addressing its root causes. In this case, this includes increasing development assistance in countries of origin, transit and first asylum, for example through strengthened Regional Development and Protection Programmes.

Excellencies,

This is not a crisis of numbers. Instead, it is a crisis of responsibility, a crisis of trust, and more fundamentally, a crisis of values. At this time of defining challenges facing the European Union, I sincerely hope that you will find the right way forward, and we stand ready to accompany you on that path.

Thank you very much.