

Opening remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Ministerial Pledging Conference on Somali Refugees

Thank you very much Antonio [Guterres], it's the European Union thanking you for the incredible work that you personally and the UNHCR is doing on this and also other aspects of this magnitude of number of people on the move. But let me address all of you ministers, those sitting here and those sitting in the audience, High Commissioner, your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all, a word of welcome to you to Brussels and this highly important - and timely - Conference focusing on Somali Refugees; it is a great pleasure for me to be here – and to actually have arrived on time. Because as the Prime Minister said I was flying tonight from my first visit to Addis Ababa, where I had the opportunity to work together with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and other members of Cabinet on different aspects of our bilateral cooperation, including a High Level Dialogue on migration. We agreed to present at La Valletta Summit in a couple of weeks a common agenda on migration and mobility. In Addis I have also had the honour to address the African Union permanent representatives and the pleasure to meet again my friend Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and other members of the African Union Commission to exchange views on many aspects of our cooperation and namely to prepare the Valletta Summit.

The world is facing an unprecedented magnitude of people on the move, conflicts and crises multiply, poverty and inequalities grow, climate change and humanitarian disasters destroy, destabilise large part of the world. Human rights violations and poor democratic systems push people to look for societies where they can aspire to live in dignity and peace.

This has to be our first common commitment - to tackle together what we call the root causes, not the symptoms only, but the real causes of the phenomenon. This phenomenon is not going to stop any time soon and the magnitude of this phenomenon is hitting first and foremost Africa. Each and

every African country is either country of origin, of transit, of destination, and, often, hosting large number of refugees as it is the case we discussed today. So it is not a European crisis, this is a global one. What partners, friends do to face a common global crisis, they sit down together and find common ways to tackle a common challenge, sharing responsibilities on the basis of our common interest and our shared values. In less than a month that is exactly what we are going to do, European leaders will meet with African partners at the La Valletta Summit on migration.

In Malta we expect to agree on concrete actions to maximise the development benefits of migration and to address root causes, to better organise legal channels of migration and mobility, to ensure international protection for migrants and asylum seekers, to intensify the fight against criminal networks engaged in migrants smuggling and human trafficking and to step up our cooperation on return and readmission. At the summit we will also officially launch the European Trust Fund to support African countries dealing with border control, fighting human smugglers and to build opportunities: job opportunities, education opportunities, resilience of communities and societies. The European Commission will make a first contribution of 1.8 billion euros to the fund and we expect our Member States to contribute and to match this amount of money. We also call on other countries to contribute to the fund. I said opportunities and I believe the key to addressing the migration crisis and also the refugee crisis is this: creating new opportunities, the opportunity to live lives free of fear and persecution, the opportunity to find a job, and a good one, the opportunity to contribute to the countries public life, to open inclusive democratic processes. We can only deal with a current flow of migrants and refugees in the world if we realise that this is not about numbers but about people, men and women and children seeking a better life.

Today's focus on Somali refugees is crucial, in particular for the following two reasons: First, this is one of the world's most protracted displacement situations, as the High Commissioner has highlighted. It has lasted more than two decades, affecting three generations of Somalis and leaving more than two million people either internally displaced or as refugees, in particular in the sub-region. We are very grateful to Ethiopia and Kenya – first and second largest refugee hosting countries in Africa respectively – for hosting large numbers of refugees and in particular Somali refugees. Even if the media attention currently may be elsewhere, this challenge has to remain high on our political agenda and should not be forgotten.

The European Union is ready to provide support, beyond humanitarian assistance, notably through the Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) for the Horn of Africa. The second reason – and this is a positive development - thanks to the unprecedented efforts by Somalia and its people themselves, the region and the international community, the country is moving in the right direction towards a more stable federal state; it cannot lose momentum. I know the agenda ahead of 2016 is ambitious but there cannot be any sliding from the commitments, in particular the electoral process and the preceding consultation process. The European Union is - and will remain - a strong supporter of Somalia becoming a viable federal state in line with the New Deal Compact of 2013. The key to success is Somalia's own ownership and commitment to internal and regional stability.

A stable and secure Somalia means a stable and secure home to come back to for Somalis who have been living for several generations in refuge or in displacement; but it means more because it will substantially increase the security in a region of global geostrategic importance, benefitting all in the region, and far beyond the region.

The Tripartite Agreement between Somalia, Kenya and the UNHCR on the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya is a very important step. I understand that, to date, some 4000 Somali refugees have been supported to return to some parts of Somalia in the context of this agreement. This is a very positive sign and we all wish to see more Somalis deciding that the moment has come to return and contribute to the rebuilding of their own country. It would be a strong signal of confidence for the country's future.

I cannot but emphasize the importance of safe, sustainable and dignified repatriation on a voluntary basis. No one should be compelled or forced to return when the conditions for return are not safely in place in crisis areas.

As a response to the current and recently more pronounced challenges in the Horn of Africa, we have elaborated an EU Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan, focusing in particular on two aspects: migration and violent extremism and implications of the broader geopolitical framework.

Regarding the specific focus on migration in the Action Plan, we suggest building on the regional cooperation framework set up with you - the Khartoum Process - focusing on human trafficking and smuggling. We also think it is absolutely necessary to enhance cooperation with regional partners

to address the root causes and provide alternatives to irregular migration and forced displacement; and we need to support states' capacity to better manage mixed migratory flows, including border management.

These are just some of the actions we suggest in the new Action Plan. Tomorrow, I know our services will present them to your representatives in Brussels and our Delegations will do the same back in your capitals. I stop here, because I know the continuation of the working day is going to be intense and important, especially the pledging part of it, let me also add that.

With a wish not only to welcome you all to Brussels and to guarantee that the European Union part of the work will continue to be consistent, committed. As we see this as a strategic investment for Europe, in not only the management of the humanitarian and not only a situation in Somalia and around Somalia. But also a key strategic investment in the stability and peace and security of the whole region, which is again, I would underline, of strategic importance for, I would say, the entire world and for sure for this part of the world.

I thank you very much and I wish you a successful day.