

Intervention by Greece

**to the Plenary Session of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum
under the theme of “burden and responsibility sharing”**

High Commissioner Grandi,

Your Excellencies,

Esteemed Colleagues,

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great honor, a deep sense of purpose and a clear notion of our shared responsibility towards refugees that today I represent Greece as one of the major host countries within the European Union.

As you are aware, in recent years, my country has been at the forefront of receiving and hosting refugees. We have the second largest number of asylum applicants per capita in the EU.

Moreover, in recent months, the Eastern Mediterranean route has once again become the main gateway of mixed flows to Europe.

For this reason as well, Greece has been, from the outset, a staunch supporter of the Global Compact on Refugees.

During the formal consultations, masterfully led by UNHCR, and following the adoption of the Global Compact, the latter holds great promise and hope for the millions of refugees around the world. And the very few –one must admit– hosting countries that offer them protection.

Burden and responsibility sharing is the central principle contained in the Global Compact. It is also what can bring us closer, working together for the benefit of refugees.

No country alone can adequately respond and manage the multiple challenges that hosting large numbers of refugees entails. These include providing for the well-being of those arriving in our counties, as well as ensuring the prosperity and security of the local communities that host them. These two things go hand in hand.

To this end, Greece has recently adopted an Operational Strategic Plan that places respect for human rights, strict security provisions along with cooperation with all our partners, at the center of our wider migration-related policies.

Respecting the right of every person to seek asylum, Greece wants to ensure that the asylum system remains effective, reliable, and fair, in order to safeguard its sanctity, and to clearly distinguish between those entitled to international protection and those who are not.

By avoiding misuse and abuse of an already overburdened asylum system, we make sure that people who flee persecution, war or violence, and human rights abuses can indeed receive international protection in Greece.

We have already undertaken specific measures: by adopting new legislation that will regulate the situation at Reception and Identification Centers, along with speeding up asylum procedures. We have made protection of unaccompanied minors a priority given their particular vulnerability. We are transferring 20,000 people from the islands to the mainland in order to address the needs of the most vulnerable.

Saving lives at sea remains an accomplishment of the Greek coastguard. Government policy along with the hospitable tradition of the Greek people represent a whole – of – society approach, as envisaged within the Global Compact.

However, we are facing an increasing challenge as literally hundreds of new asylum seekers arrive on the Greek islands every day.

In this respect, we believe that states have to abide fully by their international commitments when it comes to fighting smugglers' networks, as well as preventing the creation of illegal migrant routes from emerging.

Smugglers' networks represent a modern-day scourge that we must all together strive to eliminate. We must work together to break their business model. Greece will table a specific proposal to its EU partners in the coming weeks on how to better coordinate and jointly address the fight to stem these networks.

From the outset of the recent refugee / migration crisis affecting Europe, UNHCR has been working alongside competent Greek Authorities in order to alleviate the suffering of people in need. We are grateful for this support and we are resolute to continue our cooperation on the ground.

But there is scope for more. We therefore call on our EU partners to show an efficient solidarity, just as we are assuming our responsibilities as one of the EU front-line Member-States. We also call on third countries that influence developments on the ground to enhance their cooperation with Greece.

International cooperation and an increased multilateralism is the only way forward.

Thank you.