

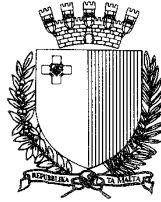
## **Statement of Malta for the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the UNHCR ExCom delivered by H.E. Christopher Grima, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malta to the UN Office and other International Organisations in Geneva**

Mr Chair

Malta aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to make some additional remarks in its national capacity.

As stated in the report on the regional update for Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges on both the Agency and States alike. Despite the number of arrivals to Europe has decreased in the first semester of 2020 compared to last year, the numbers along the Central Mediterranean route between January and September have increased by 160% compared to the same period last year, with this migration route reconfirming itself as one of the most dangerous in the world. Even with a lesser number of asylum applications in Europe this year, Malta has processed more than 1,500 first time asylum applications, with Malta ranking third with the highest number of asylum applications per capita in the second quarter of the year. In this regard, allow me to express my Government's gratitude to those Member States who assisted in the relocation of persons disembarked in Malta.

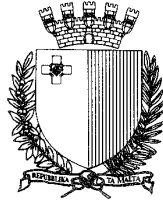
Mr Chair



While looking at these figures in the report, one has to give due consideration that we are experiencing exceptional circumstances due to the pandemic, which may hinder mobility and should not be interpreted as a reduction in causes of forced displacement. Therefore, it remains very important to maintain the focus on this region, particularly the Central Mediterranean route where the numbers continue to increase.

The number of arrivals has stretched Malta's resources to their limit, particularly in light of the emergency measures that the Government of Malta needed to impose to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Such measures were also implemented in Reception Centres to safeguard the health of asylum-seekers and refugees, such as the setting-up of an isolation centre adjacent to open centres; social distancing measures; and the dissemination of information in various languages.

Nevertheless, challenges provide us with the opportunity to innovate, giving way to a number of measures and best practices. In this regard, the processing of asylum applications was maintained online to avoid any disruptions, and the availability of online and telephone support for case support management, psychological support and counselling to people with specific needs, was provided among other measures. To this effect and taking into account our first-hand experience, my Delegation looks forward to the discussion on "International Protection in the context of a Public Health Emergency" with the view to adopt ExCom Conclusions on this subject next year.



At EU level, Malta looks forward to engage with our European partners in the discussion on the “New Pact on Asylum and Migration”, in order to ensure a well-managed and safe migration, while ensuring the return of persons who do not qualify for international protection. The recent events in the Moria reception centre in Lesvos are indeed a reminder of the importance of long-term sustainable solutions and predictable mechanisms, and we hope that a renewed European migration and asylum policy will ensure the right balance between solidarity and responsibility to better manage migration.

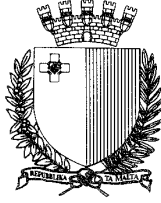
Malta has been a firm supporter of the Global Compact on Refugees since its inception. Despite the pandemic has posed a serious challenge to the implementation of pledges made by this Delegation at the First Global Refugee Forum, Malta continues to work laboriously to fulfil its commitment, having already ratified the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, with ongoing work in areas such as the integration of migrants and refugees and targeted actions for the inclusion of refugees in Malta’s labour market.

Mr Chair

Last but not least, allow me to commend UNHCR for its hard work and resilience, proving to be an effective and efficient organisation even with the rise of unforeseen challenges and working methods emanating from the current pandemic.

Equally, I would like to express my gratitude to UNHCR for being an invaluable partner to Malta and for consistently providing support. In this

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context, we very much appreciated the recent visit of Assistant High Commissioner Gillian Triggs to Malta, and we stand ready to collaborate and welcome other visits by UNHCR senior officials and missions to Malta in the future.

Thank you.

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -