



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 984  
Vienna, 20 February 2014**

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**EU Statement in Response to the Address by the UN High  
Commissioner for Refugees, H.E. Antonio Guterres**

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Dear High Commissioner Guterres,

On behalf of the European Union, it is a real pleasure to welcome you today to the Permanent Council. We thank you for your statement.

Mr. Chairman, we see today some of the highest levels of forced displacement since the early 1990s. During the first six months of 2013 alone, almost 6 million people were forced to flee from their home, compared with the 7.6 million for the whole of 2012. Most of the newly displaced persons came from Syria and we commend and express our support and appreciation to those countries hosting Syrian refugees, such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon.

We commend the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its rapid response to acute crises unfolding around the world. There are over 35 million persons of concern to UNHCR in the world: refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and others. Of these, almost five million are in OSCE participating States. They include some 2.4 million refugees and asylum seekers, 1.4 million IDPs, and one million returnees and others.

The issue of displacement cuts across all dimensions. It also cuts across the entire conflict cycle. It is a consequence of conflict and/or human rights abuses, it can precipitate conflicts, it can complicate the resolution of conflicts, and it can lead to chronic human rights abuses. In terms of human rights protection, there can be little doubt that displaced persons are some of the most vulnerable populations. We consider that the OSCE can complement the UN's leading role in this field, both in terms of respect for the human rights of refugees and IDPs, and their needs for protection, and because of the obvious link with security.

Mr. Chairman, the OSCE and UNHCR have complemented each other over the years, with the common goal of finding sustainable solutions for the displaced. High Commissioner Guterres mentioned a number of OSCE regions in which the UNHCR is actively involved. We agree with the High Commissioner that political will is crucial to bring about sustainable solutions to the many thousands who remain displaced in these countries after several years. IDPs and refugees are central factors in the conflicts in Georgia and in Nagorno-Karabakh. We thank once again the UNHCR for its active involvement in the Geneva International Discussions and commend their efforts everywhere they are needed. You have our full support for those. The launching today of a joint initiative, the Protection Checklist, with the OSCE is yet another good example of how this complementarity can play out to the benefit of those in need.

We also appreciate your remarks concerning Afghanistan that the OSCE has an important role to play in supporting regional efforts in Central Asia to make border control measures more effective and fair.

The European Union would also like to commend the UNHCR's role in helping the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, together with Croatia, with the implementation of jointly agreed commitments. The European Union and its Member States continue to extensively support the governments in the region, notably through the Regional Housing Programme in dealing with difficult issues related to refugees and displacement.

Mr Chairman, as High Commissioner Guterres rightfully pointed out: "There is something fundamentally wrong in a world where asylum-seekers drown at sea or are pushed back from land-borders." Tragic events, like those off the shores of Lampedusa or Malta in October last year, are a painful reminder. Let us stress again that the European Union is determined to reduce the risk of further tragedies of this kind from happening in the future. Increased engagement with third countries in order to avoid that migrants embark on such hazardous journeys is a priority. We appreciate the efforts of all our partners, including the UNHCR, with the implementation of our actions in this regard.

Last year, the European Union agreed to reinforce its international protection regime. We complete the legislative framework for a Common European Asylum System based on high standards of protection for people seeking shelter in the European Union. The European Union and its Member States are committed to its effective implementation. We are driven by the conviction that asylum is a fundamental right and we aim to ensure that hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers in the European Union are treated in an equally effective and fair system and in full conformity with our human rights obligations.

Mr Chairman, the world is changing rapidly and we are currently experiencing a large number of emergencies. We need the UNHCR to be a strong actor in protection and in tackling displacement situations. This requires strong partnerships with national and international partners, governments and civil society, and the pursuit of innovative approaches. We reaffirm our support to the UNHCR and we wish High Commissioner Guterres and his staff every success in the future. Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.