

Address of Mr Cervone d'Urso at the « Regional conference on 'Refugee protection' and International Migration in the Gulf of Aden »
19 May 2008

His Excellency Dr Abubakar Al Qirbi, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Agencies of the Mixed Migration Task Force

Partners from the Horn of Africa and the Gulf regions

Ladies and Gentlemen

- I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Yemen as hosts to this conference and more generally to their open door policy towards refugees as well as our appreciation to the remarkable efforts of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in raising the attention of the world to the plight of the refugees in the broader Gulf of Aden region.
- I have just arrived from Brussels a bit over a month ago and was previously responsible for our relations with the Horn of Africa and especially Somalia and have hence followed to some extent the route of the migrants across the Gulf of Aden.
- For the European Union, what happens on this side of the Gulf is clearly interlinked to instability in the Horn of Africa region. The Somali population resides in 6 neighboring countries and only by following a regional approach can we tackle their plight.
- We are strongly committed to a political solution to the Somali crisis which has plagued the region for the past 17 years and support the efforts of regional partners including Yemen, to sustain an inclusive political process. Only peace will give a prospect for a return to normal life to millions of people.
- I had the opportunity to accompany the High Commissioner to Kharaz camp and would like to laud his efforts and that of his team to give a glimmer of hope and provide for a better life to thousands of people. Please rest assured of our continued support to implement UNHCR's 10 Point Plan.

- We hope that this conference will raise the profile of one of the deplorable human tragedies and will come out with concrete proposals on how we can concretely respond to the needs of migrants and asylum seekers transiting through Somalia. We need to address the root causes: trafficking and smuggling and at same time enhance our protection response both inside and outside the camps in countries of transit and destination.
- It is very timely we have this conference in Yemen which is a country which is making exceptional efforts with limited resources. We call on the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to play their part – they are often the ultimate destination and can have a supportive role both in Yemen and in the Horn of Africa.
- The European Commission is heavily engaged in tackling this cross-regional crisis – we have historically supported through ECHO the Basateen neighborhood in Aden and Kharaz camp. We are heavily engaged in the field of migration and asylum in Yemen, Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia, notably through the AENEAS programme. Please rest assured of our commitment to do more and better by broadening our support by focusing on the provision of basic services, community development and self reliance, while increasingly supporting programmes with a regional dimension.
- Last but not least, let us not forget the other refugees from the Horn particularly the Ethiopians.
- To quote my Commissioner Louis Michel who is strongly supportive of this regional initiative: *“It is not the impossible that gives cause for despair, but the failure to achieve the possible.”* So let's come up with a regional plan of action that would articulate a comprehensive response and respond to the immense challenges of mixed migratory movement across the Gulf of Aden.

Thank you.