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Statement by H.E. Christopher Grima, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malta to the UN Office and other International Organisations for the 70th Annual Plenary of UNHCR ExCom

Mr Chair

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

This time last year, my Government took the decision to seek membership of the UNHCR Executive Committee, and over these past months we are pleased with the progress achieved, and we now look forward to participating at the 71st meeting as ExCom members.

With this in mind, we have worked hard on becoming party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and with just Parliamentary procedures still to be completed, I am sure that we will be in a position to deposit the instrument of ratification in the very near future.

Malta is a country that has first hand experience of the different facets of migration. In fact, so far over this past year, 2708 migrants have disembarked on Malta irregularly, with around

1,850 rescued by the Armed Forces of Malta and 850 brought in to our ports by NGO vessels. This represents a 214% increase in arrivals over the same period last year. Furthermore, as of 22 September 2019, 2,369 applications for asylum have been lodged in Malta.

Within this scenario, UNHCR, as the UN Agency at the forefront of the humanitarian response to migration challenges, has been a formidable partner. It is present when migrants are disembarked in Maltese ports and it has maintained a constant presence within Maltese reception and open centres for migrants.

Malta's cooperation with UNHCR spans a number of years, but this intensified with the opening of the UNHCR Office in Valletta in 2005. This co-operation has been further strengthened in the recent past and Malta is thankful for all the support provided in resettlement exercises through referral of cases, health assessments, interviews via video-conferencing and organisation of selection missions. UNHCR has also provided training on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) to government officials working in the migration sector; as well as providing training to legal aid lawyers, covering asylum cases.

UNHCR also works closely with the Maltese social partners and a number of local organisations and NGOs not only to find

durable solutions for refugees and beneficiaries of protection in Malta, but also to advocate and work towards improved access to protection and conditions of asylum in Malta; an increased protection-sensitive asylum system and related policies; to strengthen the capacities of government and partner agencies; and to increase general awareness about asylum issues in the country.

Mr Chair

Since its onset, Malta has been a strong supporter of the Global Compact on Refugee and our support to this framework remains unchanged, being an important tool for enhancing solidarity and the mobilisation of global support for burden and responsibility sharing. We therefore look forward to a successful Global Refugee Forum in December, to take stock of progress made and share best practices.

