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**73rd Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commission of the United Nations
on Refugees**

Statement by the Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cyprus, Ms.

Olympia Neocleous

Geneva, 10-14 October 2022

Agenda Item 3: General Debate

Thank you Chair,

Cyprus aligns itself with the EU statement delivered. Allow me to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

(To begin with, please accept High Commissioner, Cyprus' warmest congratulations on the well-deserved extension of your mandate).

In Europe we characterized 2015 as the year of the great refugee crisis. Seven years on, we are witnessing unprecedented levels of global forced displacement triggered by armed conflict, climate change, (inequalities, poverty) and food insecurity, persecution and human rights violations. These frequently interlinked emergencies that can amplify the other's negative impact will require, as you mentioned High Commissioner, innovative solutions and determined, concerted efforts by us all.

The EU's apt commitment towards this end is of great importance, as it interlinks humanitarian and development efforts and assistance. Helping countries of origin and host countries alike.

Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine has caused the worst displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The EU has recorded over 11 million arrivals since the beginning of the war in February. Cyprus, along the already heavy migratory flows of the Eastern Mediterranean route, has received tens of thousands of Ukrainians seeking temporary protection, reaching the second highest per capita number within the European Union.

Madam/Mr. Chair,

Cyprus, as a host country, reaffirms its commitment to fully implementing its obligations arising from international and EU law, providing asylum to those in need, while guarding the Union's external borders and seeking to tackle criminal smuggling networks.

For five consecutive years, Cyprus has consistently been the EU Member State with the highest number of first-time applications for international protection in relation to its population, **corresponding to 5% of the country's population.**

Our proximity to theatres of conflict and the 180-kilometre-long ceasefire line within the territory of Cyprus create **a unique set of conditions exploited by those who choose to instrumentalise the migration crisis.** More than **90%** of irregular arrivals to Cyprus are deliberately "facilitated" and "pushed forward"

to cross the buffer zone into the areas effectively controlled by the Government of Cyprus.

Notwithstanding the challenges, severely testing our capacities, we will continue to take decisive practical measures and implementing reforms in full adherence with our international obligations and towards implementing the Global Refugee Compact.

In cooperation with the European Union and UNHCR, Cyprus is seeking to optimize the process of examining applications for international protection, increasing the speed while maintaining the system's thoroughness. The integration of refugees and reception of asylum seekers is a top priority within our overall strategy. To this end, we are continuing the effort to establish and equip more refugee Reception Centres.

Asylum seekers have free access to health care, including mental healthcare services, with priority given to persons in vulnerable situations, such as women and girls and possible victims of torture. Vocational training programmes are also key components of our integration policy.

Cyprus continues to advocate for an Agreement on a European Pact on Migration and Asylum. This will allow us to manage migration in an effective, fair and coordinated way, as has been done in the case of Ukrainian refugees fleeing war seeking, based on the principles of solidarity and responsibility.

To conclude, I would like to reassure you once again of my government's unwavering commitment to working closely with UNHCR. The challenges are

enormous. We count on our partnership and your precious support: the UNHCR's local Office has generated important results in Cyprus - improving reception facilities, assisting voluntary returns, reunifying families, dealing with unaccompanied minors and enhancing integration.

Cyprus stands ready to do its part, to double down on efforts together with the international community to protect refugees and relieve their plight.

Thank you.