



**European Union**

**UNHCR – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**69<sup>th</sup> Session**

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**General Debate – Item 3**

**Statement by H.E. Mr Walter Stevens**

**Ambassador, Head of the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva**

**Geneva, 1 October 2018**

**– CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –**

**UNHCR Executive Committee 69th Session  
1–5 October 2018**

**Agenda item 3: General Debate**

**Statement by the European Union**

Thank you Madam Chair,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.
2. The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\*, Serbia\* and Albania\*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine align themselves with this statement.
3. It has been yet another challenging year for the Office of the UN High Commissioner in providing assistance and protection to the growing number of forcibly displaced persons around the world. As you have highlighted, High Commissioner, this last year we have witnessed new displacement, including from Myanmar, Venezuela, and several Central African countries, while other displacement situations, like Syria, have become more and more protracted. And in our own region, we continue to see a steady flow of mixed movements across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.
4. In our globalised world, forced displacement can only be addressed effectively by the international community as a whole. It is a global phenomenon that requires global solutions. Developing countries continue to host the vast majority of refugees and bear the brunt of forced displacement. It is evident that we cannot continue to go on working as if it was "business-as-usual". The EU and its Member States therefore fully support your call for a more equitable and predictable burden- and responsibility sharing, as stipulated in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and its annexed Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

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\* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

5. Since the adoption of the New York Declaration two years ago, the application of the CRRF has already generated positive, concrete results for host countries and communities and for refugees themselves in many countries. We are heartened by the many examples of laws, policies and practice that have changed, paving the way for better socio-economic inclusion of refugees, including access to documentation, health services, education and the labour market, which in the long run will lead to better outcomes for both refugees and their host communities, while also making refugees better prepared for possible return and reintegration. It is evident that the CRRF has been a catalyst for real change in several countries.

6. The EU and its Member States commend the countries applying the CRRF for their leadership and generosity. Let me assure you that we stand by your side. To do our part, the EU is already applying a CRRF approach in our external action and has launched multi-annual development actions amounting to close to 250 million EUR in CRRF countries, and in 2017 provided more than 700 million EUR of non-humanitarian assistance to the world's major host countries. This is in addition to the EU humanitarian assistance and the significant financial support and engagement of EU Member States. We also remain strong supporters of the regional approaches to strengthen cooperation in this field. The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey together have mobilised 7.5 billion EUR, with substantial contributions from EU Member States.

7. The EU and its Member States now look forward to the endorsement of the Global Compact on Refugees by the General Assembly later this year, which will signal an important paradigm shift towards a new global way of working on refugee protection and solutions. We commend UNHCR for the inclusive, transparent and comprehensive process that led to the development of the compact, guided and inspired by the application of the CRRF. However, this is only the beginning of the process.

8. The implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees will require UNHCR to continue to build new partnerships with development actors, the private sector, civil society as well as strengthen its engagement with host countries, communities and refugees themselves. This will require a mind shift within UNHCR to focus more on collective efforts and long term, development-oriented responses. While this may mean stepping away from some implementation work, UNHCR must be the leading voice and catalyst for refugee protection in a wider and more diverse system. In this regard, we welcome steps that have already been taken in this direction, including the growing partnerships with World Bank, ILO and OECD. In its operations, we encourage UNHCR to support national and local response capacity wherever possible.

Madam Chair,

9. Although the Global Compact focuses on refugee situations, we must not forget that the majority of the world's forcibly displaced do not cross an international. Internally displaced persons can often be even more vulnerable. UNHCR has an important role in the broader humanitarian response to help and assist IDPs and we commend UNHCR for its efforts to strengthen the response in situations of internal displacement.

10. While moving ahead with a more comprehensive response in refugee situations, we must also redouble our efforts to tackle the root causes of forced displacement.

11. With regard to the Syrian crisis, the EU maintains that Syrian refugees have the right to return to their country of origin, Syria, and that voluntary and sustainable return in safety and with dignity will be the preferred durable solution for most Syrian refugees in the region. The EU fully supports the ongoing work of UNHCR and its assessment that, given the current circumstances, the required conditions for organized voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees, are not in place. Until such return can take place, we will continue to support all efforts to ensure continued and effective protection of refugees in the region..

Madam Chair,

12. We also continue to work for a more equitable burden- and responsibility sharing within our region. As part of these efforts, concluding the reform of the Common European Asylum System remains central. The new system needs to strike the right balance between responsibility and solidarity and ensure resilience to future crises.

13. As part of these efforts, the EU and its Member States are working on establishing an EU resettlement framework. Since 2015, ad hoc EU resettlement programmes have already helped 38,000 of the most vulnerable refugees find protection in EU countries and further commitment have been made towards the to resettle at least 50,000 people 2018 and 2019. Resettlement is one of the key elements of the EU–Turkey agreement of March 2016, which should continue to be fully implemented. The EU and its Member States are the largest contributors to the Emergency Transit Mechanism for persons evacuated from Libya to Niger.

14. In addressing the complex and dangerous situation of mixed movements across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, saving lives remains a priority for the EU and its Member States. We remain involved in search and rescue operations and are working in close cooperation with relevant third countries and other partners to find ways to ensure that those rescued are disembarked in a safe and responsible manner in accordance with international law. Our endeavour is ensuring that all States fulfil their international obligations. We appreciate the constructive dialogue and engagement of UNHCR and IOM in addressing this situation. If we all effectively share responsibilities and demonstrate solidarity, on both sides of the Mediterranean,

we will be able to ensure the necessary degree of predictability in saving lives at sea. In addition, it is equally important to effectively dismantle the business model of smugglers and traffickers as a crucial element of our joint efforts in preventing loss of life.

Madam Chair,

15. In order to adapt to the new ways of working under the Global Compact on Refugees, and to be prepared to address both current and future challenges, UNHCR must continue to be vigilant in keeping its own house in good shape. We urge UNHCR to continue to invest in its change initiative to ensure that the organization is more innovative, effective, efficient, agile and accountable.

16. Let me conclude by reiterating the full support by the EU and its Member States to the High Commissioner and the dedicated staff of UNHCR, in being the voice and catalyst for the protection of refugees and forcibly displaced persons wherever they are.

Thank you.

(A longer version of this statement is available at [https://ec.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva_en).)