



73rd Plenary Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom)

Agenda Item 3 – General Debate

Statement by the Republic of Malta

10 – 14 October 2022

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High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Firstly, we wish to sincerely congratulate High Commissioner Filippo Grandi on his re-election as High Commissioner – we look forward to continuing our collaboration.

Malta aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to make these additional remarks in its national capacity.

A year ago, we looked at the future with a glimmer of hope as COVID-19 began to recede and the promise of recovery beckoned. Instead, in February this year, Russia's invasion of Ukraine brought death, destruction and a refugee crisis not seen in Europe for decades. Around 9.2 million people have entered the EU since 24 February, and almost 7 million remain internally displaced. While temporary protection mechanisms have helped us to collectively respond effectively to the needs of refugees, long-term solutions lie only with Russia ending the war in Ukraine and withdrawing all its forces to within its own internationally recognised borders. We condemn in the strongest terms the unacceptable breach of International Humanitarian Law due to the bombing of homes, schools, hospitals, including this week's deplorable missile attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

High Commissioner,

Ukraine is not the only country of concern. Over the past year, Afghanistan has also become once again a country which requires immediate attention. The intentional deterioration of Human Rights observance by the authorities in control has deprived thousands of their basic rights, particularly women and girls, and created a significant push-factor. Currently, Afghan nationals comprise the largest group of applicants for asylum in the EU and associated countries.



**THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF MALTA TO THE UN GENEVA**

Closer to our region, the Central Mediterranean has remained precarious. This year, we have seen a significant number of arrivals for another year as a result of instability in the Mediterranean region, such as Libya and Lebanon. It is concerning that in the central Mediterranean this year arrivals have registered a steep increase of over 20,000 additional arrivals year-on-year, topping 68,000. This is presenting significant challenges to the receiving countries such as Malta, considering that it is comparable in size to the Canton of Geneva. To-date, over 600 asylum applications were lodged in Malta.

High Commissioner,

Malta has always been a firm advocate for solidarity mechanisms that would enforce burden and responsibility sharing and establish a predictable relocation mechanism. We express our gratitude to those Member States that have assisted with the relocation of persons disembarked in Malta.

At the EU level, Malta continues its engagement with our partners on the “New Pact on Asylum and Migration”, to renew European migration and asylum policy and ensure the right balance between solidarity and responsibility to better manage migration flows.

We have also supported the UN Global Compact on Refugees since its inception and progress in the implementation of pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum continues in areas such as refugee integration. One example is the “I Belong” programme, the national migrant integration programme introduced in 2018, which has reached hundreds of adult service-users at some stage of their integration journey, teaching Maltese and English, as well as cultural orientation. During the pandemic, services were successfully moved online, meaning that integration services were uninterrupted. Another successful integration-related story is the “Turning the Tables” initiative in which refugee communities, led by the African Media Association Malta (AMAM), were empowered to lead and develop their own specific policy proposals on areas such as education, employment, and political rights. This approach complements the successful activity base of refugee communities in Malta.

We look forward the second Global Refugee Forum to be held next year.

High Commissioner,

UNHCR continues to be an indispensable partner and we highly appreciate UNHCR’s continued assistance and cooperation, particularly through its offices in Malta. The role of UNHCR in addressing these unfolding crises remains as crucial as ever. We commend the work carried out by UNHCR and its partners globally, and pay tribute to their courage under very difficult circumstances in the field.

Thank you.