



ITALY

Statement by Ambassador Laura Mirachian,
Permanent Representative of Italy
at UNHCR's Ministerial Meeting
(Geneva, 8th December 2011) PM

Mr. Chairperson,
esteemed High Commissioner,
distinguished Delegates,

Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the Polish Undersecretary of State on behalf of the European Union and ~~its Member States~~. Therefore, I will only touch upon a few issues that are of particular interest to my country.

This is a year of celebration and commemoration.

But it is also a year of new acute suffering for displaced people and asylum seekers in particular. In addition to the long-standing crises such as in Afghanistan, the Middle East, parts of Africa, in particular Somalia and the Horn of Africa, we were witnessing this year new serious crises, due to the historical developments taking place in Southern Mediterranean Countries. We appreciate the unequivocal message the High Commissioner wanted to convey to us in opening this session: we have a moral and legal duty to receive people fleeing dramatic scenarios and not to cultivate xenophobic reactions. Rather, we have to foster an approach to the problem inspired by a sense of solidarity and humanity. **Italian people have a longstanding tradition of reception and integration, and we note with appreciation that Italian private citizens are among the largest contributors to UNHCR's activities.**

Mr. Chairperson,

on this occasion, we wish to commend the commitment and the achievements of the High Commission for Refugees in fulfilling its mandate, and more so considering the difficult challenges of this year. ~~We pay tribute to the UNHCR field officers who accomplish every day their mission and to their tireless dedication and work.~~ At the same time, we consider very important to foster international cooperation and we are pleased to see that the European Union is reformulating its policy in this direction. Only through a stronger international solidarity and burden-sharing, among States, among International Agencies, between States and Agencies, we can improve our performance and avoid the gap between rights and realities.

Mr Chairperson,

Italy's geographic location has inevitably turned our Country into an entry gate to Europe. While we are deeply sorry for the ones who never made it and were trapped into the Mediterranean sea, we recognise that our duty is to control the EU common border by fighting illegal trafficking, and at the same time to identify individuals in need for protection, providing them with the necessary assistance and instructing asylum procedures. With reference to the massive flow of migrants from the Northern African shores, we wish to express the Italian gratitude to UNHCR and to the High Commissioner for the constant assistance the Agency, together with IOM, is being offering our Country and our Institutions. UNHCR has been helping us by providing substantive support with regard to interviews and investigations relating to individual persons, including by participating in the "Territorial Commissions" competent for deciding on refugee status in the first instance. This help is crucial in saving life and providing security for hundreds of thousands people. From January, more than 60.000 migrants reached the Italian coasts by boats, of which more than 90% from Libya and Tunisia. Only the small Island of Lampedusa has been receiving more than 50.000 people. A comprehensive plan involving all Italian Regions and Municipalities has been drawn up to host the new-comers throughout the national

territory, with special attention to women and non-accompanied children. But our task would be much harder without the help of UNHCR officers.

Mr. Chairperson,

I conclude by confirming Italy's strong commitment to the humanitarian cause, and our continuing active support to the International Humanitarian Law and to the Conventions relating to Refugees and Stateless people. Thank you.