

69th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Statement by the Republic of Cyprus

Thank you Madame Chair,

Cyprus aligns itself with the European Union's statement, and wishes to add the following comments.

We thank the High Commissioner for his comprehensive opening remarks.

In 2018, the number of people forced to flee their homeland continued to rise to unprecedented levels, affecting us all. This is an issue of international concern and requires our collective response. We must ensure the adequate protection of forcibly displaced populations while at the same time we assist the countries hosting the majority of the world's refugees.

My government is a staunch supporter and looks forward to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. We are confident that taking into account the integration capacities of each country, it will contribute to a more equitable distribution of the responsibility of hosting and supporting the global refugee population. I would like to commend UNHCR for its integral role in conducting the formal consultations on this important document.

In addressing the current large scale refugee movements, the 1951 Geneva Convention and its Protocol are more relevant today than ever before. The ratification and full implementation of this solid legal refugee framework, without any constraint, should be one of our priorities.

Furthermore, we strongly advocate addressing the root causes of a refugee crisis from the very beginning, to save lives and alleviate human suffering. International humanitarian efforts need to be combined and complemented by peace efforts in conflict-affected countries, in order to achieve political solutions to crises around the world and to prevent new cycles of displacement.

Madame Chair,

Cyprus is located near a major conflict area and countries hosting large numbers of refugees. We have experienced forced displacement in our recent past and still suffering from its impact and we are currently a destination of great number of refugees. In fact, in the second quarter of 2018, Cyprus had the highest rate of registered first-time applicants in the EU.

Recognizing the increasing relevance of integration, as stated yesterday by the High Commissioner, Cyprus government, with the financial support of Asylum, Integration and Frontiers Fund, has put in place a strategy and a number of projects aiming at the integration of beneficiaries, which include among others language courses, recreational activities for residents of the reception centers, educational programs and provision of psychological and social support to applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.

The mixed migratory and refugee flows along the Mediterranean, which have been affecting my country, illustrate the importance of the principle of solidarity, in a global and regional context. In this framework, we would like to stress the necessity of cooperation between neighbouring countries, including negotiations and effective implementation of readmission agreements. Regional arrangements in place, like the EU- Turkey Statement of 2016, should be respected and fully implemented. Unfortunately due to political expediencies, international cooperation is often compromised.

In dealing with the current increase in the migratory and refugee influx in a humane way, my government has put in place a set of measures aimed at improving the asylum procedures and expediting the provision of assistance to those in need, while tackling the irregular migration and combating the smuggling and trafficking of persons. We are very concerned about the impact of these latest developments and we firmly believe that only international cooperation and solidarity will make it possible to find solutions.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to praise the UNHCR's staff, who often work under strenuous and life-threatening conditions. My government remains committed to continuing its support of UNHCR to fulfil its mandate, through the close cooperation with the in-country office and funding of their programmes.