

**Statement delivered by Vincent Cochetel, Director of Europe Bureau on behalf of UNHCR**

**Senior Officials Meeting of the Valletta Summit on Migration 8-9 February 2017**

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The commitments enshrined in the joint Valletta Action Plan (VAP) and Declaration are, in UNHCR's view, important tools to address in a comprehensive approach the current challenges related to mixed migration within Africa and towards Europe.

The VAP was taken into account in the development of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September 2016 by the UN General Assembly. The New York Declaration, among other things, commits the international community to ensuring the full respect for, and protection of, the human rights of all refugees and migrants. In doing so, it tasks States with developing two compacts by 2018; a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which will set out a comprehensive framework for international migration governance and a Global Compact on Refugees, which will provide for predictable responsibility sharing arrangements among countries of origin, transit and destination for large refugee movements. UNHCR is leading the process of developing the Global Compact on Refugees in close consultation with States and all other relevant stakeholders. That compact will be informed by lessons learned from piloting in several key countries the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) foreseen in Annex I to the New York Declaration.

The New York Declaration acknowledges that those countries hosting the majority of refugees need robust, predictable, sustained support and solidarity to create an environment where refugees can live in safety and rebuild their lives, reducing the compulsion for people to undertake irregular dangerous movements. In addressing the irregular movement of refugees and migrants, the New York Declaration also confirms the need to do so with the aim of combatting abuse, exploitation and discrimination, without prejudice to the right to seek asylum.

Although the VAP and its five priority areas and the New York Declaration are separate and distinct frameworks, they are clearly interrelated. One year after the adoption of the VAP, I wish to share with you five observations.

**First**, it is recognized by all, that **movements** within the African continent and from the African continent to Europe are **mixed in nature and thus require differentiated responses**. Mixed movements include persons who are fleeing conflict and persecution. Although this was not really acknowledged in the Malta Declaration adopted by the European Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2017, we should not forget the mixed nature of these movements evidenced by the fact that 39% of those arriving in Italy through the Central Mediterranean Sea get international protection (refugee status or subsidiary / humanitarian protection). Within the Horn of Africa and from the Horn of Africa to Europe, refugees and asylum-seekers constitute the largest number of persons on the move. While refugees and migrants often move along the same routes using the same facilitators, refugees are different in an important regard: they cannot return to their home countries. These are people for whom denial of asylum has potentially deadly consequences.

UNHCR would urge States to ensure that the benefits of all five VAP priority actions are inclusive of refugees, and not only those actions developed under the priority on protection and asylum. For example, those initiatives aimed at strengthening resilience, self-reliance and economic opportunities must be made available to those forcibly displaced (including their host communities), so as to help reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and ensure access to livelihoods in the region. The building of refugee self-reliance will eventually contribute to preparing them for sustainable return, should this solution become available in the future. Such initiatives must go hand in hand, however, with the development of sustainable asylum systems and investment in protection programs in key transit countries.

**Second**, a year later, while a number of projects have already been designed, UNHCR would like to warn against two potential risk areas:

- One is the **fragmented approach to the funding** of VAP activities to date. Indeed a multitude of bilateral actions and projects have been taken and funded by EU Member states since the Valletta Summit that were not always in line with the VAP nor coordinated with those EU funded programs and projects under the Emergency Trust Fund for Stability to Address Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa (EUTFa). UNHCR calls for comprehensive, integrated and better coordinated approaches across all EU funded actions, including those undertaken bilaterally to ensure maximum impact.
- The second risk is that some States seem primarily interested by one or two components of the five priorities activities which could lead to **an unbalanced implementation** of the VAP.

**Third**, since the conclusion of the Valletta Summit on Migration, UNHCR has been actively engaged in the Khartoum and the Rabat Processes, each tasked with monitoring the implementation of the VAP. UNHCR has contributed expertise within these processes on refugee protection and solutions. As the lead protection agency in the regions affected by the VAP, UNHCR also calls for a greater and more systematic engagement in the activities funded by the EUTFa in order to ensure that all member States uphold their international obligations and maximize the prospects for solutions. UNHCR welcomes the opportunity to be consulted on how such protection safeguards and prospects for solutions can be systematically mainstreamed in these programs and projects going forward.

**Fourth**, to date, UNHCR has received some initial funding from the EUTFa to enhance the protection environment and the prospects for solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees in Mali, Niger, Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya. UNHCR and its local partners, as per the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit, would welcome additional financial support in order to meet all the pressing protection and solution needs in these specific countries, as well as in all other countries falling under the scope of Valletta.

**Fifth**, Priority Two of the VAP, commits States to promoting regular channels for migration and mobility. Increasing available safe legal pathways to protection for refugees in particular, remains a priority. Despite the direct link between family reunification and successful local integration, refugees still experience unnecessary hardship in ensuring that their families can join them. Resettlement quotas remain limited, almost virtual. As an example, less than 2,000 refugees have been resettled from Ethiopia and Sudan to Europe over the last three years. Labor mobility or overseas educational schemes for refugees from their region of flight also remain almost inexistent. Combatting the business models of traffickers will only be truly successful if such legal pathways for refugees are accessible to them. UNHCR calls for greater efforts to be made in this area also as an expression of solidarity and responsibility sharing for refugee protection and solutions, notions that are at the core of Treaty of the European Union itself and of the New York Declaration.

**Sixth**, UNHCR would like to highlight the importance of the contributions of civil society actors to Valletta. Civil society are key partners and front line facilitators not only in the delivery of protection to

refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, but are often the only avenue by which the voice and needs of these individuals are included in political agreements.

**Seventh**, Italy has seen the arrivals on its shores of more than 25,000 **unaccompanied and separated children**. UNHCR is calling on States to approach the challenges posed by this phenomenon through a child protection dialogue. It is crucial for States affected by this trend to take individualized decisions based on the best interests of the child, rather than to immediately channel such children into asylum or other law enforcement-related procedures. From my own observations in Italy last December, I can assure you that the best interest of these children may be in the majority of the cases family reunion and reintegration assistance with the relatives in their country of origin and for others local integration or legal transfers to a third country. UNHCR will convene a dialogue with the key countries of origin of these children and other interested stakeholders in 2017 with a view to put in place practical mechanisms for identification, family tracing and family reunion & reintegration.

**Eight**, UNHCR fundamentally believes that we need to approach **the issue of return of persons not in need of international protection** with less politicization and emotions. The return of persons not in need of international protection is not just a North-South issue, it is also an intra-African challenge. It is an integral component of any asylum and migration management system. UNHCR encourages States to respect the commitments they made in this respect at our Executive Committee when adopting its conclusion on 2003.

**Finally**, UNHCR recalls its December 2016 Proposals for Europe on "Better Protecting Refugees in the EU and Globally" paper, which speaks to the need for a EU Common Approach to Migration and Asylum that build on existing cooperation frameworks, including the VAP and New York Declaration. UNHCR stands ready to support the EU in designing a bold yet workable approach to managing refugee protection and solutions, both within the EU and globally.

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