



Press Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the UNCHR high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing for Syrian refugees

Geneva, 30 March 2016

Dear all,

Today is a very important event to step up international efforts in managing the refugee crisis.

This morning, we heard first how this affects the immediate neighbouring countries and the Herculean efforts they are making to provide assistance to the Syrian refugees on their soil.

The global community expects the EU to deliver.

I want to tell you that Europe is here too, and that's what I have come to confirm today. Europe and the UNHCR share the same goal and objective: Protecting people in line with European and international standards.

First of all, Europe is here to continue to support countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon to provide protection and assistance to refugees.

But secondly, and equally important, Europe is also ready to take its fair share. We have come a long way from where we were only a year ago. While several European countries – and some of those are here today – have been resettling refugees for years, in July 2015, the 28 Member States together with Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, have set up the first ever EU resettlement scheme for 22,504 people in need of international protection.

It has led to a first time-engagement of 10 new resettling countries within the EU.

So far, 4,555 people from Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have been resettled in this framework to 11 States.

The UNHCR has played a pivotal role in this, and they remain our key partner. But we are not there yet of course.

2015 has been an unprecedented year with more than a million arrivals to the European Union, where also a few thousand people have unfortunately lost their lives, using the dangerous sea route.

In order to end this dangerous route, and especially the business of the ruthless smugglers, we have reached an important agreement with Turkey on 17-18 March.

But if we want to effectively close the backdoor to irregular and dangerous migration routes, we have to open a safe and legal window.

People have to be able to trust that they will be resettled in order not to embark on a dangerous sea or land journey.

European Member States still have a commitment to resettle the remaining 18,000 from the EU scheme.

But this is not enough, and I have consistently been urging Member States to resettle more.

That is why we have proposed to Member States to use the 54,000 places not yet attributed under the intra-EU relocation scheme, to legally and directly admit Syrian refugees from Turkey.

This is under the understanding that, if all goes as planned under the agreement with Turkey, the flows will decrease.

In addition, we continue to work on the establishment and implementation of the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme from Turkey.

The practice of resettlement has existed for years. We should not be reinventing the wheel, so we should learn from and exchange best practices.

With the EU, we should further streamline and harmonise our practices to facilitate and upscale resettlement efforts.

But most importantly, we need to step up delivery and foster political will. Let us not forget however, that this needs to get done at a global scale.

The migration and refugee crisis is a global challenge, and requires a global response. Today's high-level meeting is essential for this, and this afternoon we will discuss the preparations of the New York Summit in September on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.

Because this is not a one-off thing.

If we want to truly address the current characteristics of the refugee crisis, we will have to start resettling massively and consistently for the years to come.
