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United States Mission to the OSCE

On Support to National Authorities in the Migration Crisis by Security Forces

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
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Thank you very much, Madame Chair.

I wish to thank our distinguished presenters for highlighting the sobering challenge of responding to the flow of migrants and asylum seekers from across the Mediterranean and into and across Europe.

The trend of migration and displacement will continue as a long-term challenge. In the last two years alone, 65 million people have been displaced by rising violence, brutal conflicts, insecurity, and persecution – more than at any time since World War II. In the time that I am speaking here today, another 100 people will be forcibly displaced.

In the face of this challenge, an appropriate role of military and other security forces is indispensable – not only for border security, but also for the safety and well-being of migrants themselves. National security and the safety of migrants are fully interconnected. A UNICEF and International Organization for Migration (IOM) study published last month showed that more than 75 percent of Europe-bound youth migrants reported being subjected to exploitation of some form, including forced labor, sexual abuse, and child, early, and forced marriage. EUROPOL estimates that these illegal activities generated as much as €6 billion in revenues in 2015 in OSCE participating States, as some of the world's most desperate people were pushed into the arms of unscrupulous criminals. Failure to assist these migrants who have been exploited and abused by smugglers only feeds the growing threat from transnational organized crime to security and stability in the OSCE region.

Over the years, participating States have resolved to protect not only the integrity of our borders, but also those within them. At the 2004 Ministerial Council in Sofia, we all pledged to “take steps, in conformity with domestic law and international obligations, against discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia against migrants.” We recognize that the needs of migrants can cause financial difficulties, ethnic and communal tensions, environmental impacts, and pressure on institutions. Turkey, in particular, is making extraordinary sacrifices by hosting over three million refugees – more than any other country in the world today. More broadly, we recognize the challenges faced by all front line, transit, and destination states. They share the burden of our first and foremost priority: to save lives, provide timely humanitarian assistance, and ensure respect for the human rights of all migrants and refugees.

Cooperation and coordination with international organizations, including UNHCR and IOM, as well as NGOs, is critical to foster effective and comprehensive regional responses. They

can support government efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance is in place at disembarkation points, and that migrants are appropriately screened for, or given the opportunity to, assert protection concerns. Other responses focus on fighting the trafficking and smuggling of migrants. And here, the United States is in complete agreement with the recommendation that the OSCE play a more active role in combating human trafficking.

Through its deployment in the Aegean Sea, NATO is providing real-time information to the coast guards and relevant national authorities of Greece and Turkey, as well as to Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard agency. With the information collected by NATO ships, Greece, Turkey, and Frontex are able to save lives. On a bilateral level, the United States of America strives to support efforts by the Italian government, Interpol, and Frontex to bring human traffickers and smugglers to justice. And where appropriate, our law enforcement authorities are investigating such crimes.

The United States has also confronted migration challenges in other regions, starting in our own backyard, with three maritime mass migrations since 1980. The United States Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security have established policy and doctrine for a whole-of-government plan. Known as Operation Vigilant Sentry, this plan is designed to prepare for, prevent, and mitigate the effects of maritime mass migration in the Caribbean region. Our experience in dealing with and planning for maritime mass migrations may prove helpful to other countries who are confronting similar challenges.

Finally, we welcome Italy's prioritization of migration during next week's OSCE Mediterranean Partners Conference in Palermo, as well as during their Chairmanship next year. We continue to believe that, as a regional cooperative security organization, the OSCE is in a unique position to improve cooperation to make migration safe, orderly, and regular, and to enhance the protection practices in OSCE participating States. Many of the OSCE executive structures and field missions remain active on humane migration management and combating trafficking in human beings. And the OSCE has convening power to bring together countries affected by the migration and displacement phenomenon, enable more effective cooperation, and to facilitate the sharing of information to assist law enforcement.

In closing, I wish to emphasize that only by working together can we address this long-term challenge in an effective, safe, and humane way that also strengthens our security and stability. At the 1992 Helsinki Summit, we recognized the need for international cooperation in dealing with mass flows of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. This need remains just as urgent 25 years later.

Thank you, Madame Chair.

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