United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 3
Humanitarian issues and other commitments, including:
Migrant workers, the integration of legal migrants;
Refugees and displaced persons;
Treatment of citizens of other participating States

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Avis Bohlen, Head of the U.S. Delegation to HDIM
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The well-being of migrants, refugees, displaced and stateless persons in the OSCE region is a longstanding priority of the United States.

In particular, we view the protection of refugees and migrants as a vital means of supporting democratic transitions taking place in several OSCE participating States in the surrounding region. We therefore encourage participating States to work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to protect vulnerable migrants, including by providing maritime assistance to those in distress, facilitating the voluntary return of displaced persons, and finding durable solutions for refugees. We are especially appreciative of Turkey's humanitarian assistance, including sheltering some 80,000 persons displaced from Syria.

Acknowledging that migration can result in increased responsibilities for some participating States due to their geographic location, the United States remains concerned by an over-reliance on detention and deportation measures, including for children, in Greece, Western Europe, and elsewhere in the OSCE region. Such measures serve as additional barriers to those seeking asylum and in some instances may violate OSCE commitments agreed upon at the Ljubljana Ministerial Council of 2005.

We are particularly concerned by the rise in anti-migrant violence in the region. Human rights groups have documented more numerous assaults on migrants in Greece this year, including the death of a 19-year-old Iraqi migrant fatally stabbed by five motorcyclists. In a separate incident, flares were thrown into a Muslim prayer room where ten migrants were praying.

Therefore, we commend public statements by senior Greek leaders condemning such violence. We also welcome the Greek government's announcement that it will strengthen its legal framework for the prosecution of racially motivated acts of violence, as well as the establishment of a new police unit dedicated to combating hate crimes. Moreover, xenophobic rhetoric and action by political figures have the potential to exacerbate prejudice and violence, while political leaders should be urging justice. In Greece, the police are investigating members of the Golden Dawn party for destroying street stands operated by migrant vendors. The Italian president's

denunciation of the murder of two Senegalese migrants in December exemplifies ways in which political leaders can encourage solidarity instead of deepening divisions.

In the face of growing intolerance against migrants in the region, we urge participating States to utilize ODIHR's program Training Against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement.

Moderator, as noted by Secretary Clinton at the State Department's Global Diaspora Forum, the United States has the largest number of immigrant or global diaspora members of any country in the world. Indeed, most Americans have immigrant roots — and these roots are a quintessential part of our national narrative. Migrants make up close to 13 percent of the U.S. population, with almost one quarter or 60 million Americans being first- or second-generation migrants, comprising 16% of our labor force and owning 18% of small businesses that employ more than 4.5 million Americans.   That is not to say that migrants face no challenges in the United States -- that is not the case – but there is broad recognition that like the immigrants who founded our country, present day migrants continue to make valuable contributions to our society

Recognizing this fact, this year the United States has introduced a new policy that would allow more than 1.5 million migrants brought to America as children to become citizens.