



**UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**  
**30<sup>th</sup> Session**

**ORAL STATEMENT**  
**by the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights**

**Agenda Item 8: Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna  
Declaration and Programme of Action**

**General Debate**

**28 September 2015**

*The Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the Mediterranean and the key role of the  
UN Human Rights Council*

**I. Introduction**

Following the radical increase of the refugee and migration flows in the Mediterranean, the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights (MFHR) remains concerned about the dangers refugees and migrants have to face. With more than 310,000 people arriving in Greece since the beginning of the year, over 3,500 of them died, when trying to pass the dangerous sea crossing, making 2015 the deadliest year so far.

Due to the fact that all Member States, the UN itself, the EU and international organisations are bound by the international human rights law, they must cooperate to prevent violations of and protect the human rights of refugees and migrants. In particular, the UN Human Rights Council should find solutions which give refugees and migrants the right to start a new decent life away from war, tragedies and poverty. To this direction, the MFHR makes the following crucial suggestions:

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Consultative status with the UN [ECOSOC (special), DPI], UNESCO (official relations) and the Council of Europe

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## **II. More and trained rescue teams – Opposition to push-backs and to any military intervention**

First of all, the solution to the refugee and migrant crisis can only be a peaceful one. The UN Human Rights Council should urge its Member States to mobilize more groups of trained search and rescue teams in the Mediterranean. FRONTEX, as the primary agency for the promotion, coordination and development of EU border management, should enhance its operational activity and stop the increasing number of human tragedies at sea. It goes without saying that we are strongly opposed to the illegal practice of push-backs (*non-refoulement*) and any type of military intervention.

## **III. Equal distribution of refugee population among UN Member States – Reform of the Dublin Regulation System**

Cooperation and solidarity among the EU Member States underpin the ideal of the European Union and are a basic requirement in order to respond properly to the refugee crisis. The Dublin Regulation system requires that those seeking asylum shall apply in the first Member State they enter in the EU, that is, the Member States at the external borders of the Union, mainly Greece and Italy. Thus, it is extremely hard and unjust for one country to provide care and support to asylum seekers. For this reason, the Dublin Regulation system needs to be reformed to a more fair and efficient direction. The UN Human Rights Council should exercise pressure on the EU and its Member States for the reform of the refugee protection and allocation system. Contrary to these proposals, building of fences at the external and internal borders of Europe is rather disappointing and must be condemned.

In principle, we welcome the recent decision of the EU Council to allocate 120,000 refugees among EU Member States, but we consider it at least inadequate due to the increasing influx of refugee flows. In addition to that, the UN Human Rights Council should propose to non-EU Member States to undertake an equal allocation of refugee population. In this regard, USA, Canada and other countries have already expressed their willingness to accept and host a large number of refugees.

## **IV. Improvement of living conditions**

One of the greatest problems that Greece and other host countries are facing is that of lack of structures to support the refugees and migrants. The situation witnessed by national and international NGOs when they recently visited the islands of eastern Aegean was appalling. Food is provided scarcely and only thanks to NGOs, poor living conditions, lack of basic hygiene conditions and medical care are a reality. The improvement of the existing degrading living conditions of the refugees and migrants, the establishment of proper first reception centres and the required special care facilities for the unaccompanied minors should be primarily addressed by the international community in general and by the UN Human Rights Council in particular.

## **V. Accelerate identification and recording**

The rise in asylum applications is a natural consequence of the increased refugee and migration flows. The process takes too long, due to lack of proper organization and shifting of the work from the local authorities to the NGOs. Translators are not sufficiently available and thus it is hard to recognize the vulnerable newcomers. In addition to that, lack of administrative and police personnel, red tape, absence of (safe) biometric technology and of infrastructures deteriorate the existing situation and slow down the pace of the identification and recording procedure.

As a result, the local authorities of host countries need funding, expertise and guidance from the EU and the international community in order to provide for better organization and efficiency.

## **VI. Safe alternative routes – Dismantling smuggling networks**

It is imperative that the UN Human Rights Council assists the Member States in providing safe routes – alternative to boarding smuggling vessels – for refugees and migrants. It is especially in such emergency situations that safe legal channels for refugees and migrants must be developed. The smuggling networks have to be dismantled and any solution provided by the international community should be in accordance with international human rights law.

## **VII. Conclusion**

To conclude, the refugee and migrant crisis is a humanitarian crisis, a crisis of ethics and values. The abovementioned suggestions and solutions should be put into action in order to improve the situation, save lives and above all protect the fundamental human rights. The UN Declaration of Human Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This value shall become a beacon of the key solution to the refugee and migrant crisis.

Letting children die at the shores of the Mediterranean means that the values that underpin the 70 years existence of the United Nations and especially the respect for human dignity are sacrificed for financial and political power. The image of a 3 year-old dying at the shores of the Mediterranean lies far away from these values. The international community through its most competent institution, i.e. the Human Rights Council, must act now by adopting a respective resolution before we witness another human rights *shipwreck*.