

**Statement of H.E. David O'Sullivan, Ambassador  
Head of the Delegation of the European Union Delegation to the United States  
Before the US Helsinki Commission –  
October 20, 2015**

I would like to thank you, in particular, Chairman Smith and your Co-Chairman Senator Wicker, as well as the other members of the Commission for giving me the opportunity to present the main components of the EU's response to the refugee crisis. I am David O'Sullivan the European Union ambassador to the United States, a position I have held for just about a year and it is an honor to speak to you today about what the press refers to as "the migration crisis in Europe."

The ongoing refugee crisis is not a European crisis. It is a global crisis, fuelled by conflicts, inequality and poverty, the consequences of which unfolded in Europe but the roots of which are far away from our continent. This does not mean that we as Europeans do not have a responsibility to respond to it.

Nevertheless, we are seeking a global response to achieve a lasting solution to the conflicts, instability and poverty, which are the main causes of the refugee crisis, working closely with our international partners.

This crisis is also a sensitive issue for Europeans. While some of our Member States are facing major economic difficulties, many of our fellow citizens wonder about our capacity to welcome and integrate new waves of migrants.

However, I also want to emphasize that European citizens have offered unprecedented support to the refugees. Civil society is showing a vibrancy that often goes unreported but is strong, moving and comforting and provides first help to thousands of refugees across Europe.

Among the many examples I have in mind, I would like to point out the incredible signs of support expressed by Greek citizens to migrants. While Greece is still facing a severe economic crisis, local people in islands like Kos or Lesbos have continued to donate food and other basic supplies to help the refugees.

In Italy, a country which has encountered economic difficulties for some time, 300 families from Lombardy have responded to the appeal of the Archbishop of Milano, Cardinal Scola, by offering to host refugees in their homes.

I also want to mention the throngs of people joining marches and vigils across Europe in a show of solidarity with refugees, with almost 30,000 people in Stockholm. And of course, it is impossible to forget the images of Syrian migrants being welcomed at train stations in Germany and Austria.

**Overview of the situation**

Whether one looks at the numbers or at the images, the current refugee crisis is of unprecedented magnitude.

We are confronted with a multi-faceted phenomenon, comprising economic migration on one side and asylum seekers on the other side, with despair and quest for security and a better life as their common denominator. By October 2015, 710,000 migrants and refugees had entered the European Union this year, while only 282,000 migrants crossed EU borders for the whole of 2014.

I want to underline that the migration crisis is of a mixed nature, comprising economic migration on one side and "forced migration" of asylum seekers on the other side.

It is important to keep the question of economic migrants separate from the issue of refugees.

This calls for different types of responses from the European Union. We have a responsibility to show solidarity and put in place the adequate mechanisms of reception for refugees. By virtue of international law, refugees have a right to protection. No state, regardless of whether it has signed the U.N. Refugee Convention, can return a refugee to a place where his life would be endangered.

On the other hand, migrants, whose motivations are primarily economic and who are not entitled to international protection and cannot be legally admitted will be provided temporary accommodation, while appropriate mechanisms are put in place for their return to their countries of origin in accordance with the international rules and standards.

### **The EU response**

We all understand that ultimately, only political solutions to the conflicts combined with economic development in the host countries will provide a lasting solution to the migration and refugee crisis in Europe.

At the political level, we need to work hard to find solutions to conflicts such as the ones in Syria and Libya. To do this, we need to intensify our diplomatic engagement with all relevant international partners. In parallel, a lot of work needs to be done on the root causes of migration in the main countries of origin.

At the operational level, we continue to work hard in order to provide support to those who need it, respecting human rights and providing protection notably for the most vulnerable.

We have taken steps to deal with migration crisis a long time before it hit the headlines. We have mobilized our instruments, with three objectives: (i) to save lives, (ii) to ensure protection to those in need and (iii) to manage borders and mobility.

- We launched rescuing operations Poseidon and Triton and tripled our presence at sea. Over 122,000 lives have been saved;

- Member States have agreed to relocate 160,000 refugees from Greece, Italy and other Member States directly affected by the refugee crisis. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, a first flight took off from Rome, Italy carrying migrants to Sweden. This solidarity is based on the shared understanding by Member States that geography should not determine the burden to bear;
- The EU has launched a crisis management operation (EUNAVFOR MED) – which aims at disrupting the business model of migrant smuggling in the Southern Central Mediterranean and has now entered the second, active phase. In this context let me thank for a constructive approach of the US in the UN Security Council on that issue;
- The EU has led the international humanitarian response since the beginning of the Syria crisis with more than €4.1 billion mobilised. Member States and the Commission announced on September 23<sup>rd</sup> an additional contribution of €1 billion to UN agencies and the World Food Program;
- The EU has established the EU regional Trust Fund for Syria (Madad Fund) with more than €500 million funding in order to enhance resilience in refugee hosting countries around Syria and provide opportunities for refugees to pursue livelihoods, have access to education and labour market;
- The EU is also setting up the Emergency Trust Fund For Africa focused on addressing the root causes of irregular migration from Africa;
- The EU is also significantly strengthening its support to transit countries in the Western Balkan which are under enormous pressure in handling the refugee flows. An important high-level conference on the Eastern Mediterranean/Western Balkan migratory route took place recently in Luxembourg (8 October);
- We step up our support to and strategic dialogue with Turkey, which is a key country in the region hosting a large bulk of the refugees. We have just negotiated with Turkish authorities a Joint Action Plan aimed at addressing the phenomenon in a spirit of partnership and burden-sharing. The EU will make available €1 billion for refugee-related actions in 2015-16, in order to support refugees and their Turkish host communities and strengthen cooperation to prevent irregular migration;
- The High Representative is holding High Level Dialogues on migration with key Third countries in order to identify leverage and enhance cooperation in the area of migration. Cooperation on return and readmission of those who are not entitled to stay is also an important aspect in this context;
- An effective response to the current requires us to work closely together, as the international community, to address both its consequences but also the root causes. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have worked closely with our international partners, including the US, to formulate a global response. We welcome considerable humanitarian assistance provided by the US authorities in the context of the refugee crisis so far. We hope that there will be opportunity to cooperate more with the US also in order to provide

more resilience and opportunities for the refugees in the region. Appreciating the involvement of the US in the crisis, especially as regards resettlement, the UE is counting strongly on the US to heighten its efforts, including by expanding the resettlement quotas.

### **Next steps**

Undoubtedly, the refugee crisis has generated major challenges for the European Union. We have been able to take major steps to build a common approach and common policies based on solidarity and responsibility. In order to deal with issues that have long been seen as internal affairs at the heart of their sovereignty, EU Member States have agreed to develop a strong and multi-dimensional EU response.

On November 11-12, European heads of state and government will convene with key African countries to tackle the roots of economic migration in Africa during the Valletta Summit on Migration.

On November 13, the EU-US Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial meeting will take place to discuss the matter in details and exchange experience and best practice in managing migratory flows.

Over the next 6 months, the European Commission will also bring forward new major legislative proposals to implement a robust system that will bear the test of time.

By December 2015, the Commission will come forward with a proposal to strengthen Frontex and enhance its mandate in the context of discussions over the development of a European Border and Coast Guard System, giving it the competence and financial resources it needs to run return operations and to support member States.

To reinforce the overall migration and asylum policy of the EU, the Commission will also table a proposal for a permanent resettlement scheme and further reform of the Dublin Regulation in March 2016.

In addition, the Commission will table a legal migration package including the revision of the Blue Card, the EU work permit for highly qualified workers, in March 2016.

The EU will also continue to provide protection to those who come to Europe as well as continue its efforts to establish safe and legal means for asylum seekers to seek protection in Europe without risking their lives, for instance through expanded resettlement. It is crucial to protect people in need of protection in a humane way – regardless of which EU Member State they arrive in. The EU and its Member States are firmly committed to the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants. Despite the influx, we do not remove or return genuine refugees, we respect the fundamental rights of all persons arriving in the EU, and we invest major resources in saving lives at sea. No flow of refugees justifies the catastrophic humanitarian conditions that we have seen earlier this month. This is why we need better harmonised procedures, better cooperation and shared standards across the globe. This is why the involvement of Europe has been increasing.

We will also closely monitor how the situation evolves in Turkey and in other countries neighbouring Syria and further adapt our policies accordingly, keeping as a priority international protection and humanitarian assistance to those in need.

Despite the challenges which remain ahead of us, I strongly believe that the refugee crisis can actually make the European Union stronger and more resilient.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss such an important issue with you.