

Check against delivery

Mr. Chairman, Mr. High Commissioner, Ministers,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

We would like in our turn congratulate you, Mr. President, for the important work accomplished in the Executive Committee this year. We would like also to pay tribute to the High Commissioner and through his Excellency, to his devoted staff for carrying successfully UNCHR's mandate for protection of refugees and responding to new challenges.

Greece is fully aligned with the statement made by H.E. Ambassador Jean-Baptiste Mattei of France on behalf of the EU.

Nevertheless, we would like in our turn express our deep appreciation for the rapid and timely response of UNHCR to the recent crisis in Georgia that Greece supports also by voluntary contribution.

As stated by the EU Presidency, desperate situations that we are witnessing in the Mediterranean need to be addressed. We call for increased cooperation of transit countries with UNHCR and their strong commitment to combat human trafficking.

Although situation in Iraq might be considered as improving, Iraqi refugees still remains a serious concern for neighboring countries, for my country as well. We strongly support UNHCR's effort to pursue action for durable solutions.

Greece would like to express its deep appreciation for to High Commissioner's commitment for structural and management changes in order to direct UNHCR's resources and energy to the field. We strongly support also UNHCR's commitment to delivering as One initiative and to strategic partnerships with other humanitarian agencies.

In seeking solutions to problems that Europe faces in Asylum, Greece, fully supports the French Presidency's initiative for a Common Asylum Space aiming at increased solidarity and burden sharing amongst M-S. In

this context, Greece has offered to host the EU Support Office for Asylum, once established.

Greece, as a country with an extensive maritime border and at the cross road between the South, East and North routes for migration movements, has received a **tremendous pressure** during these last five years. In the year 2007, we have witnessed a total of 112.000 illegal entries. This increase of mixed flows has resulted to an increase of the requests for granting asylum, **an increase of 461%** between 2004-2007. Many of these requests were either dissimulating economic reasons or applicants have had, as final destination, other countries.

Notwithstanding the above mentioned pressure, Greece is **fully and unconditionally** committed to the protection of persons in need under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

A systematic effort is deployed by the Greek Authorities for upgrading Asylum Procedures and Hosting Conditions. Greece closely collaborates with UNHCR for solving all outstanding issues.

As to **vulnerable groups**, a particular attention is paid to the protection of minors and women. Minor's protection falls under the responsibility of Minor's Prosecutor who closely monitors their protection.

Greece is also strongly committed to **combat human trafficking** not only by repressive but preventive measures, as well. A national Action Plan has been elaborated to protect and assist victims of Human Trafficking.

An important number of smugglers and traffickers have been arrested at the land and sea borders totaling for nearly 1500 for 2008 (eight months).

Preventive action is carried in a number of neighboring countries by implementing programs of assistance and information to potential victims of trafficking, particularly for women, as amongst the most vulnerable group of population for human trafficking. A memorandum of Cooperation has also been signed with UNHCR for women and girls, refugees and asylum seekers.

Last but not least, we would like to bring to the attention of the Executive Committee that the Greek Coast Guard has saved, with real

devotion to their duty, the life of 4.137 persons in 217 Search and Rescue operations, in 2008-January to August (an issue on which UNHCR is particularly attached).

By concluding, Mr. President, we would like to reiterate our deep appreciation to UNHCR's effort in accomplishing successfully its mandate that we support by voluntary contributions, as well.

Thank you