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103rd SESSION OF THE IOM COUNCIL

*Address by ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the UN at Geneva,
H.E. Dr. Milos Prica*

Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Director General of the International Organization for Migration for his detailed presentation of the IOM activities.

Allow me to warmly welcome the new member states of the IOM family, Turkmenistan, the Republic of Island, Republic of Fiji and the Republic of Marshal Islands.

Mr. Chairman,

Bosnia and Herzegovina's migration tradition is characterized by both voluntary, economically driven migration and forced migration during and after the 1992–1995 conflict. Whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long tradition of migration, the most significant migration flows have occurred in the last two decades. The first of these, a result of the 1992–1995 conflict, involved the massive displacement of an estimated 2 million people or nearly one-half of the country's entire population. Forced migration both within the country and abroad significantly changed its demographic structure. The second wave of migration immediately after the conflict involved the massive numbers of returning refugees from abroad and significant numbers of returning internally displaced persons. At the same time, the refugees from BiH emigrated from their host countries to third countries, primarily the United States, Canada and Australia. The third period (beginning in 2000) has been characterized by voluntary migration, which is predominantly labor driven. Neighboring countries such as Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro have become increasingly important as destination countries. Since 2000, an average 15,000 to 20,000 citizens of BiH have emigrated every year to the EU. In terms of internal migration, economically driven rural-urban migration amounts to less than 1% of the country's population a year.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been faced with extensive brain drain. A large portion of emigration from our country refers to the skilled and highly educated labor force - the World Bank estimates that the emigration rate of tertiary educated from Bosnia and Herzegovina amounts to 28,6%.

As a country located at the migration crossroad between the East and the West, Bosnia and Herzegovina wishes indeed to be a part of the global solution in the area of international migration, and we have multiple reasons for doing so. Our partners from IOM and other organizations share the same view, that in recent years Bosnia and Herzegovina has made significant improvements in its migration management capacities: the country currently possesses all basic migration management structures and legislation. Visa liberalization was granted for citizens of BiH in 2010, permitting those possessing a biometric passport to travel to and throughout the Schengen area without a visa for up to 90 days.

Some of our most recent steps in capacity building to manage migration according to EU standards were promotion of security sector reforms, enhancing border management, fighting human trafficking, facilitating managed migration and providing return and reintegration assistance to migrants.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a very productive and visible cooperation with IOM. Our joint activities are broadly aimed at identifying and promoting practical and human solutions to migration management in the region, enhancement of cooperation between BiH and the international community, building capacities in migration management and security sector reform, providing assistance to vulnerable migrants and empowering minority groups, facilitating effective social, economic, and cultural integration and youth employability opportunity.

Having said this, allow me to underline the joint initiative of UNHCR and IOM aimed to strengthen the ideas and actions for refugee protection and international migration in the Western Balkans. That document is intended to serve as the basis for discussions with the Governments of the Western Balkans and other stakeholders on how to best develop a comprehensive and cooperative approach to address the challenges, strengthening the existing processes and initiatives. It also takes into account in particular the steps undertaken by countries in the region in their efforts to align their legislation and practice in the area of asylum and migration with the European Union acquis, in preparation for their aspired accession to the EU.

In view of migration and development, Bosnia and Herzegovina acts in accordance with the European Commission's recommendations entitled Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, and follows the recommendations set out in the European Commission's Biannual Report on Policy Coherence for Development.

Mr. Chairman,

Human mobility within countries and across borders has become an integral part of today's social, economic and environmental landscape. As a matter of fact, human mobility is one of the defining features of today's world. Therefore, we believe that it is essential that migration be given due attention in the post-2015 UN development agenda. Migration and development are highly interdependent processes, and it would be impossible to create a fully inclusive, open and transparent framework without addressing adequately migration issues.

I thank you for your attention.