

## Intervention of Greece 107th Governing Council of IOM

Thank you Chair,

We align with the statement delivered by the EU.

First of all, allow me to congratulate you and the new bureau members on your election, as well as to express our pleasure in welcoming the state of Tonga as well as the new observers to the IOM family.

We wish to start by thanking the Director General for his tireless leadership, drive and motivation that played its part in the successful integration of the IOM to the UN family in this critical juncture. Last June We also supported the acknowledgement of the IOM as the global lead agency on migration. Consequently, we hope that the IOM, in its new capacity as the migration agency of the UN, will play a key role in securing better global governance of the migration phenomenon. This endeavor will only succeed if our shared humanitarian values stand up to critical tests, as well as to global commitments made during the 19 September Meeting Summit in New York.

To begin with , our key humanitarian focus this year remains unaltered. Saving lives. This year, 55.037 fellow human beings have been saved so far by our Coast Guard in the Aegean during 1.107 search and rescue operations. For the first three months of 2016, 366 deaths were reported in the Eastern Mediterranean route, while from April this year until end of November 63 deaths were reported, according to IOM data. This constitutes a drastic reduction in loss of life in the Aegean Sea compared to last year. As the DG stressed the other day, people need to be alive in order to have options. Legal migration remains the safest option. As you know, last year especially, many people put their life to the hands of criminal smugglers in our region. In Greece, the arrests of smugglers increased by almost 30% from 2014 to 2015. This year, though, arrests of smugglers have decreased by 50% so far, compared to last year, and this may be an indication of the significant reduction of smugglers' criminal activities.

Tremendous efforts are being made in order to respond to the needs of the migrants and refugees stranded in Greece and to respect their dignity. First of all, we would like to stress that last spring the national authorities ensured, under very difficult circumstances, a smooth and peaceful evacuation of the very large makeshift camp of Eidomeni near our northern border, where 12000 migrants and refugees were stranded, only within two months from its creation. There are constant improvements in the reception sites, especially in the mainland, where we are trying to implement, with the help of our humanitarian partners, an out of camps approach. Challenges remain especially in the islands where the volume of asylum applications has exponentially increased, (causing overcrowding and sometimes tensions between nationalities in the reception and identification centers but also among the local communities). We would like to pay tribute to all the local population -including local authorities and citizens' associations- going out of their way in order to offer their solidarity to the migrants. The choice of solidarity over xenophobia is a daily reality especially in the frontline islands and mainland towns where a difficult socioeconomic context persists . This is not an easy balance to maintain in the long term, unless a more solidaire global and regional approach on shared responsibility is pursued. The central government will maintain this responsible approach by sparing no effort to reach consensus on solutions with the local authorities and population, as well as the migrants themselves.

On a different note, we stress that the school year has started for 18.000 refugee and migrant children in our country with an adapted curriculum, and we want to thank IOM for providing transportation of the children to their schools under relevant EU funding. We also want to thank

IOM for the continuous support provided through its assisted voluntary return programs. This year, 5200 people have returned from Greece to their place of origin in a dignified manner, and we believe in further boosting the potential of these programs. Also measures have been taken since 2015 to establish access to universal free health coverage regardless of status.

Greece supports IOM work in the field of migration data and stands ready to contribute in making this data more reliable, accurate, comprehensive and impartial. We also commend iom's migrant health platform, as well as its work on countering trafficking and smuggling - a key area of concern to us.

Mr Chair,

In conclusion, we express appreciation for the IOM's multifaceted work in Greece and hope that the decades of operational expertise of the organization in the migration field can contribute to an actionable UN global compact on safe, regular and orderly migration.