

**Statement by Greece to the 105th Session of the Council of the International
Organization on Migration (Geneva, 25-28 November 2014)**

Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, please allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of your duties. Leading the IOM Council is not small a task and we are certain that you will fulfill your mandate with great success. Let me also express my gratitude to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Chavez Basagoitia, for his commitment and tireless efforts to further the IOM agenda. Indeed, his visit to Greece in the first half of this year was an important moment in the longstanding relations between my country and the IOM.

Greece aligns itself fully with the Statement delivered by the European Union and wishes to underline some additional issues that are of particular importance to our country.

Firstly, we would like to thank the Director-General for his comprehensive Report and to express our sincere appreciation for the great job done in 2014. The IOM has yet again played a pivotal role in the orderly and humane management of migration, in the promotion of international cooperation on migration issues and in the provision of humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, be it in the four level 3 emergencies and elsewhere, including its latest involvement in addressing the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

At the same time, with innovative approaches such as the “IRIS” initiative to lower recruitment costs for migrants or its partnership with the UPU on reducing the costs of remittances, just to name a few examples, the IOM has contributed immensely in the search for practical solutions to migration problems. One of the most important observations made by the Director-General on numerous occasions is that there is an urgent need to change the narrative on migration and to present its real parameters and dimensions in an objective manner, based on data and not on certain preconceived stereotypes or prejudices. At the end of the day, we are

talking about human lives, personal dignity and the legitimate quest for a better future. We indeed commend the Director-General for always pinpointing this issue.

For all the reasons outlined above, Greece is in favour of maintaining the IOM's distinct and independent character. Indeed, with 9,000 staff, 97% of which are in the field and with a 9:1 ratio in favour of national staff, the IOM is undoubtedly the global migration agency, which should continue to be at the forefront of the whole Migration discourse. It is with this understanding that we offer our full support to the proposal made by the Director-General to conduct non-binding and informal consultations with the United Nations on the question of the relationship between the IOM and the UN.

Mr. Chairperson,

Turning now to the IOM's presence in Greece- which is, as you are aware, one of the major gateways of the European Union, with migratory pressure coming both from undocumented migrants, as well as asylum seekers- we are very appreciative of the IOM's longstanding support in addressing the challenges our country is facing in this respect. More specifically, the IOM's main initiatives in Greece include the implementation of Assisted Voluntary Returns, Re-integration and related information campaigns, as well as carrying out counter-trafficking activities, in cooperation with the competent Greek authorities.

As far as national initiatives to further improve protection and refugee systems, since August 2010, Greece has adopted a new strategic plan for asylum and migration management, the National Action Plan, which has been implemented for four years now with great success. In addition, our country has devised the Revised Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management, which aims to rapidly, efficiently and effectively address any problems which were observed during the initial implementation of the Action Plan.

Mr. Chairperson,

One of the issues which the Director-General highlighted in his Report was the question of the fatal journeys of migrants in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and elsewhere. Indeed, as regards protection at sea, for Greece the past few months have been particularly challenging in the Mediterranean, with the numbers of those crossing the Aegean being constantly on the rise. We express our condolences to the families of all those who have lost their lives in dangerous sea journeys, at the hands of criminal smugglers. The sacrifice of human lives should serve as a reminder to the international community that there is an urgent need to address this serious humanitarian problem in a holistic manner, by fully respecting the principles of burden-sharing and solidarity. For our part, we have spared no efforts to combat human trafficking in the Mediterranean and to save lives in humanitarian Search and Rescue operations at sea. Indeed, since the beginning of 2014, the Greek Coast Guard has saved more than 10,000 lives. In any case, there is a need for a further discussion on this issue and in this respect we intend to participate very actively in the forthcoming High Level Dialogue on Protection Challenges at Sea, organized by UNHCR.

To conclude, Mr. Chairperson, we would once again like to take this opportunity to commend the IOM for its leading role in migration issues and to express our readiness to further enhance our cooperation with the Organization, in our efforts to address the challenges posed by the strong migratory pressure which our country faces at this particular juncture.

Thank you for your attention.