

108th Session of the IOM Council

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General debate

Statement by Ambassador Thomas HAJNOCZI
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Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, let me express Austria's sincere appreciation for the excellent leadership of the Director General and the Deputy Director General, as well as for the dedicated work of IOM staff in the field and at Headquarters.

Austria aligns herself with the statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

We welcome to this Council Session the new Members Cuba and the Cook Islands as well as the new observer State Kuwait and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) together with all other new observer organisations.

Austria has recently been affected by significant mixed migratory movements of refugees and migrants, particularly from Syria and its neighbouring countries. One major reason for displacement remains the sad and disturbing fact that entire cities and villages are destroyed or heavily damaged by the use of explosive weapons. When homes, hospitals, schools and critical infrastructure are bombed and reduced to rubble, civilians are almost always those most affected and often have to leave. Since 2015 about 150,000 persons have filed an application for international protection with the Austrian authorities; more than half, of them have already been or will be granted international protection. The Austrian government has invested considerably in measures to foster social integration and inclusion for them. Still, there is also a large number of migrants arriving in Austria from other countries of origin,

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without need for protection. In view of a comprehensive and credible migration policy, including the need to return irregular migrants that do not qualify for asylum, IOM is an important partner in supporting Member States to develop and offer sustainable solutions, in particular via its Voluntary Return programs.

It is clear that large movements of refugees and migrants have political, economic, social, developmental, humanitarian and human rights ramifications, which transcend all borders. These are global phenomena that call for global approaches and solutions. We therefore welcome the adoption of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants in September last year. Both the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, as mandated by the Declaration, constitute an unprecedented opportunity to agree on a common and well-balanced approach with a view to addressing and reducing irregular migration as well as to facilitating and ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration, including return and readmission. We look forward to the stock-taking event in Puerto Vallarta and thank IOM for its important role and valuable input to the process so far.

Director-General, Austria is grateful for the excellent bilateral cooperation with your organisation. We are proud to host and substantially support IOM's Country Office as well as the Regional Office for Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Vienna. Migration is also a very important issue during Austria's current Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In this context, our government hosted a Conference of the Central Asian Border Security Initiative (CABSI) focusing on Security – Migration – Prosperity in the region; we were very pleased about IOM's participation in and support for this event.

In 2017, Austria has supported IOM's operations in particular in the areas of migration management, voluntary return, resettlement and combatting trafficking in human beings. Austria also welcomes the efforts of IOM to offer support to transit countries hosting large numbers of migrants.

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In particular, IOM has been a very valuable partner in the implementation of our national programs for humanitarian admission and resettlement of Syrian refugees. Together with IOM and UNHCR we have resettled almost 1,900 Syrian refugees to Austria since 2014.

In previous years, Austria also significantly increased its financial humanitarian aid, which in 2017 so far totals more than 60 million USD. This year, we have for the first time allocated funds to IOM's humanitarian work in Niger in addition to our regular unearmarked and earmarked contributions to IOM. As in previous years, Austria has also contributed to the IOM Development Fund through unearmarked contributions.

Let me finally emphasize that Austria highly welcomes IOM's new status as UN related organization in accordance with the agreement signed between IOM and the UN in September last year and the essential elements of IOM as stipulated in Council Resolution 1309.

2018 will be a crucial year for the organization: IOM will see a change in leadership and Member States are set to agree on the Global Compact for Migration. We thank the Director General for his excellent stewardship and tireless efforts which contributed to IOM's impressive growth during the last decade. Your organization can count on Austria's continued steadfast support; in particular, we would like to see a key role for IOM in the follow-up to the Migration Compact.

Thank you.