

**IOM 111<sup>th</sup> COUNCIL**  
**Geneva, 24 – 27 November 2020**  
**Item 11 – General debate**  
**Statement of Greece**  
**delivered by Dr. Iakovos Iakovidis**  
**Deputy Permanent Representative of Greece**  
**to the United Nations Office and other International**  
**Organizations in Geneva**

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Since this is the first time I take the floor, I would like to congratulate you on your election and wish you every success in your new mission.

Mr. Director General,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the European Union and wishes to add the following on our national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Director General for his report, which clearly depicts the heavy burden of the IOM as well as the emerging multi – faceted challenges for the Organization amidst the global pandemic context.

Let me, also, express our sincere appreciation to the Director General, as well as to his staff in Geneva and in the IOM Office in Athens, for the ongoing support and assistance provided to my country in coping with an endurable migratory crisis during the last five years. The Director General and his staff had a first-hand experience of the extremely challenging situation we are faced with during your visit to Athens, in November 2019.

Mr. Chair,

The increasing number of migrants worldwide along with the outbreak of the pandemic which had a severe impact on global migration and human mobility, highlighted the fact that the IOM now, more than ever, has a key role to play in addressing the challenges of international migration. And we have the necessary instruments to do so. I fully subscribe to the Director General's statement, in the Regional Review meeting in November that the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is a "significant milestone in multilateralism". Among other, it serves as a guiding document for member states to improve

international cooperation on migration and as a useful platform to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic challenges.

Mr. Chair,

Since 2015 Greece has been at the forefront of an unprecedented world migratory and refugee crisis which affected the totality of the European continent. Over the last five years, Greece has pooled both human and material resources with a view to efficiently addressing the situation. The combination of this crisis with the COVID – 19 pandemic resulted in an even more difficult situation for the Greek state to handle, the main reason for this being that the pandemic has further exacerbated existing vulnerabilities of migrants and persons of concern. In this context, we spared no efforts to further improve living conditions both on the Aegean Sea islands and in the mainland.

The first and foremost priority of the Greek government was and remains the safety and protection of migrants' lives, physical and mental health. Despite the tremendous pressure from the Minor Asia coasts during the previous years, the wider picture on the Greek islands has considerably improved lately due to a decrease of arrivals of migrants at the Reception and Identification Centers.

Mr. Chair,

2020 has been a year with more than one black swans. Besides dealing with a global pandemic, an arson led to the total destruction of the RIC in Moria, Lesbos, let alone the events of last February and March at the EU's external borders in the Evros region, where we all witnessed the instrumentalisation of human suffering by state actors. Under these exceptional circumstances, it is also important to highlight that Greece attaches great importance on protecting vulnerable groups of migrants. In this respect, a number of initiatives by the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum are ongoing.

In particular, a program of relocation of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, including unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) and vulnerable families to other EU Member States with the cooperation of IOM, the European Commission, the EASO, UNHCR and UNICEF is being currently implemented. Within this framework, as of November 11, over 1.600 people have been relocated, and in this regard we are thankful for the tangible solidarity demonstrated by our EU partners and the above mentioned stakeholders.

Mr. Chair,

The response to the crisis requires genuine solidarity and shared responsibility. No State can bear this burden alone. And this is our fundamental position, as regards the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, namely striking a genuine balance between responsibility and solidarity. Furthermore, we attach particular importance to effective return and readmission policies, as an indispensable component of coherent migration management. Of course, this cannot happen without preventing, combating and eradicating human smuggling and trafficking, resulting in modern forms of slavery.

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

In closing, allow me to reiterate once again my country's firm commitment in continuing its cooperation with IOM on the ground.

I thank you.