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General Debate

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR YURI STERK
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

Madam Chairperson,

Director General, Excellences, Distinguished Delegates,

The Republic of Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement of the EU and its member states.

Furthermore, I would like to add some comments in a national capacity.

Mr. Director-General,

Let me join previous speakers in thanking you for your Report and the analytical updates on the current humanitarian challenges related to the migrants' situation on the ground as well as for your overview of the current and projected IOM activities.

We congratulate IOM on its 70th anniversary and commend its commitment and the dedication of its staff in providing all along these years support and response to challenges, often in remote and conflict-ridden areas.

Bulgaria welcomes and continues to support the ongoing process of IOM internal reform which should ensure that IOM not only remain a responsive, flexible, efficient and cost-effective organisation with a vast field-presence, but also maintain its core values and related engagements such as the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programs.

We also value IOM as our key partner at national level in areas such as return, reintegration, and integration of foreigners, in raising public awareness about migration policies, and in efforts to combat human trafficking.

This year Bulgaria adopted its new National Migration Strategy for 2021-2025 - a framework for building a complex and sustainable normative and institutional basis for successful management of legal migration and integration, for providing the necessary care to asylum-seekers and persons receiving international protection in Bulgaria, as well as for countering illegal migration. Improving the effectiveness of the **policy of return of illegal**

migrants is one of our priorities, with a clear emphasis on the voluntary nature of this process. We highly appreciate the support of the IOM in this respect.

I will now dwell on some of the most challenging topical issues today. Let me start by reiterating that promotion and protection of human rights should be our primary consideration when dealing with outstanding problems related to migration.

We remain seriously concerned over the instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes by third states seeking to exert pressure on European borders, as witnessed along the Belarusian border with Poland and with Baltic countries. We deeply deplore the loss of life caused by such inhumane practices, which violate international law and human rights.

Bulgaria stands in full solidarity with the EU Member States concerned.

Bulgaria shares the concerns about the **disproportionate effects of the pandemic** particularly on women, children and persons with disabilities. We fully support IOM's determination to further incorporate disability in all aspects of its humanitarian response. As a material expression of this support Bulgaria has transferred 50.000 Euros in 2021 for the implementation of the Strategy for inclusion of people with disabilities in Iraq.

We appreciate IOM's consistent advocacy for the inclusion of people on the move in national vaccination plans, health responses and other services. Bulgaria's **National Vaccination Plan** has been developed in an inclusive manner.

In addition to the pandemic, we are witnessing many new as well as protracted humanitarian crises.

We share the grave concern over the worsening humanitarian situation and the rising number of internally displaced persons in **Afghanistan**, as well as the growing potential for large external migration. A strong and consolidated international response is needed in order to effectively tackle the urgent humanitarian need of the Afghan population.

We are also alarmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation in **Ethiopia** and call on all parties involved to fully respect human rights, comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and commit to good-faith efforts towards de-escalation and peaceful settlement.

Let me conclude by reaffirming our strong support for IOM as the global lead agency for migration and for its efforts to address the challenges humanity is facing.

I also reiterate our appreciation of the excellent, long-standing and strategic partnership between IOM and Bulgaria.

Thank you for your attention.