

High Level Meeting on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants

Roundtable Six 3:00 pm-6:00 pm

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Addressing vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants on their journeys from their countries of origin to their countries of arrival

- Excellences Chairs, distinguished panelists, it is a privilege and an honour to be participating in this crucial roundtable discussion
- I am sure you will all agree the perilous and treacherous journeys refugees and migrants take from their countries to their countries of arrival are among the most painful to come to terms with let alone fully understand and comprehend
- We have all seen the makeshift death vessels that capsize killing more innocent lives than can be accurately quantified and in the process creating untold orphans and victims

- Refugees and migrants are among the most bravest and resilient people in the world. Imagine the best case scenario that a refugee makes it safely from their home to another country, they still have to navigate a vast labyrinth of legal and social challenges with often limited or no assistance at all. This process is as lonely and frightening as the journey to safety itself for most refugees.
- Refugees and migrants face many challenges when taking the painful forced journeys from their countries of origin to their country of arrival. Among these are exploitation and abuse on the part of human traffickers and smugglers who promise everything to desperate refugees with no other options.
- In the case of Somalis many leaving for mainly the EU, USA and other places, pay smugglers extortionate fees to connect them to their smuggling networks across Africa and other transit states. This fee is often paid for by the selling of family homes and other vital assets. During the journey, these people are abused, illegally imprisoned and their families extorted for more money before they are given the chance to risk their lives at sea. Girls and women undertaking this journey have been reported to have been raped and used as sex slaves if families did not pay ransoms for their release in transit countries.

- I do not know the exact number but more than one can possibly imagine and bear have perished in the Mediterranean Sea from my country and other neighboring states. The pain is felt by our nation and the world as a whole but we need tangible action to bring this to an end.
- The horrors of these experiences are compounded by the uncertainty of survival at sea or in land before they reach their destination. Even where one does reach a country of security, they are immediately challenged on the credibility of their claims for refugee status regardless of gender, age and disability. This process is of course rigorous and often further victimizes the refugees by forcing them to relive painful events without support.
- Addressing vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants on their journeys from their countries of origin to their countries of arrival requires we work collectively internationally to criminalize and punish people smuggling and disrupt the criminal cells that benefit from the process such as kidnappers.
- We also need to enforce a duty to act, a positive duty to save lives at sea rather than give in to the politics and wait until distressed unseaworthy vessels carrying distressed refugees and migrants reach our national waters.

- I pay special tribute to the Italian coast guard which does an amazing job of saving lives and to the EU member states that are contributing and supporting these rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea. I think these operations need to be formalized and better funded in the spirit of responsibility sharing for refugees.
- I also pay special tribute to the Government of Turkey for welcoming Syrian refugees and providing the opportunity to learn, work and employer's genuine incentives to employ refugees whilst also providing humanitarian assistance to them.
- Other key vulnerabilities for refugees and migrants are vital public services for survival such as education and health. Both are necessary and a basic human right. Again, I congratulate all the government's that provide this support to refugees and migrants on their journeys from their home to their new place of safety.
- Of course education about safety and rights would be most appropriate but the circumstances in which refugees and migrants leave their home is not always conducive for this. People smugglers rely on this lack of knowledge and fear to truly capitalize on the miserable situation of refugees and migrants.

- Addressing vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants on their journeys from their countries of origin to their countries of arrival also requires we urgently agree on safe and legal procedures for migration for work, study and settlement.
- In the long term, peace, good governance and economic and social opportunities will be the real solutions to tackling the refugees and migrant issue internationally.