



PERMANENT MISSION
OF ESTONIA TO THE UN

Statement
of Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia, Mr. Väino Reinart
September 19, 2016

**High-level meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants,
The Round Table No 4 - Global Compact for responsibility-sharing for refugees;
Respect for international law**

The past year in Europe, faced with massive migration by refugees and economic migrants, was frightening to many of our citizens. Schengen area, covering 26 European countries without internal border controls and with a population of over 400 million people, became under the real threat. The European unity and solidarity was crumbling.

While several years ago the refugees arriving by boats from the Middle-East and Africa were a concrete concern for just a few destination countries, today it is an urgent issue for the entire Europe, and for the entire world. But we have to admit that the crisis has laid a particularly heavy burden to a handful of countries, including the home countries of our co-chairs, Greece and Croatia. We cannot and will not leave these countries alone who have been most directly affected by the refugee and migration crisis.

We all have to contribute in a spirit of burden sharing and using different policies and means available in order to find a solution for this common concern of global scale. It is our duty to fulfil our commitments under the international law and international conventions on the protection of refugees, too many of them women, children and unaccompanied minors, forced to leave their homes.

Estonia, a small country and a border state of the European Union, is determined to do our part in tackling the current situation, but also in shaping the sustainable long-term solution globally. We are participating in the joint actions on the European Union's external borders under the auspices of Frontex, the future European Border and Coast Guard; we are relocating and resettling refugees under the European Agenda on Migration from Greece and Turkey, we are pledging to the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, we are supporting third countries in the Middle-East, Africa and the Western Balkans, (including Croatia by participating in a Frontex operation at the Croatian-Serbian Border).

From here on, I would like to focus on children. According to UNICEF, there are nearly 50 million children who are on flight from violence and insecurity; the total number has risen by 77 per cent in past five years. These children may be refugees, internally displaced or migrants, but first and foremost, they are children. The children – both who are traveling on their own or with their families – are at particular risk during these hazardous journeys. Their vulnerable status makes them easy target to exploitation, human smuggling and trafficking – they are at risk of the worst forms of abuse and harm.

And we know that these threats the refugee children face during their travel do not disappear when reaching to their destination countries where the principle of the best interests of the child is often neglected or overlooked, though not deliberately at all times. In many cases the migrant and refugee children fall through loopholes of asylum and immigration procedures due to the extreme work load pressure, they may face xenophobia and hostility, or they may face limited access to justice, education, health and social services.

Estonia, as well as other countries of the European Union, is fully committed to protecting child refugees and migrants in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international obligations. Estonia also places emphasis on children's rights among our three priorities for the chairmanship in the Council of Europe which Estonia currently holds. A special focus is given on children in migration and this subject will be profoundly addressed at an annual high-level conference on 4 November this year in our capital Tallinn.

In the current European refugee and migration crisis, Estonia is giving primary consideration at all times to the best interests of the child, for example we are implementing

a clear policy of keeping children from not being separated from their parents during the asylum and migration procedures.

Above all, I would like to emphasize the importance of allowing all refugee and migrant children to get equal access to education and social protection. Estonia is determined to ensure that all children are in education immediately after their arrival. We believe that this is not only a collective responsibility but it is a common interest of all societies and all human beings who wish a better future for our children. Therefore, we strongly support the UN, and UNICEF in particular, in achieving the key priority of getting refugee and migrant children into education because it is one of the most powerful ways to protect and integrate children and to give them one of the best opportunities of their lives.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the true importance of the Political Declaration and its two Annexes adopted by the Heads of State and Government today. It confirms the need for consensus and cooperation on global governance of migration and refugees. I reaffirm Estonia's engagement in the upcoming discussions of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to be concluded by 2018.