



**PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE**

الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

Statement by H.E. Amb. Sergio Piazzi
Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean
on the occasion of the High Level meeting on
“Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements
in the perspective of the new development agenda”

70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
UNHQ New York

30 September 2015

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon,

(Check against delivery)

Excellences,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, I would like to start by thanking the Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for convening this high-level meeting on such a pressing issue. The present crisis seems to have caught Europe and many other countries either unprepared or unwilling to deal effectively with it from neither a humanitarian prospective nor a political one. Let me focus on our region, the Mediterranean, and in particular on the refugee crisis, which comes over and above that of illegal economic migrations.

This meeting takes place at a time when the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Middle East and Western Europe in particular, are facing an unprecedented large-scale humanitarian and political crisis, resulting from a migratory phenomenon of biblical dimensions, as result of the protracted conflicts in Syria and Iraq. It is there that the phenomenon has its roots, and it is there that millions of people still are either displaced within the borders of their own countries, seeking the protection of their governments, or have crossed into neighbouring states, to save their lives.

PAM has for long reiterated that this dramatic phenomenon requires a new and urgent approach based on more coherence and solidarity among the EU member states themselves, beyond the mere financial support and sea rescue operations, or the repeated announcements of military action against organized crime and human traffickers.

Too many innocent people lost their lives attempting to cross from Turkey into Greece or from Libya into Italy. How many more children do we have to see face down in the water of our beaches before a concrete plan is in place?

The situation imposes on all of us an adequate and continued support to the host countries neighbouring Syria and Iraq, which shoulder the bulk of refugees, as well as to the international organizations assisting the over 12 million people displaced within the borders of Syria itself.

Four months ago, I led a PAM delegation to Syria and Lebanon. In Damascus and Beirut, UN Officials alerted me on the fact that large numbers of refugees in the camps in the neighbouring countries of Syria had

started moving towards Europe due to the length of the crisis, the lack of adequate international assistance and the absence of hope to return to their homes.

Immediately after, PAM organized, in Morocco, an international parliamentary debate dedicated to "Extremism, terrorism and tragedies of illegal immigration in the Mediterranean: which policies to face these renewed challenges?"

We benefitted from the presence and contributions by senior experts from UNHCR, UNODC, the EU, the Commander of the Italian Naval Search and Rescue Operation in the Mediterranean, FRONTEX, and IOM, among others. The conclusions are unanimous and, may be, granted, but those Governments, to whom these were addressed, have yet to find a common position on the question.

Our Assembly has been working tirelessly to reach out to key players, partners and relevant stakeholders to address migration flows in its different aspects. We have called on our own national parliaments to commit beyond the immediate lifesaving and TV declarations.

On a practical side, PAM has signed an agreement with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a team of our MPs has already been trained to conduct joint assessment and protection field missions in refugee crises. This is an important instrument of our advocacy role.

A couple of days ago, I addressed a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, H.E. António Guterres, requesting a joint PAM/UNHCR debate for our MPs to be better prepared to tackle this issue. The recent meeting on EU Interior Ministers did not yield any result, and I sincerely hope that the EU/AU Summit on Migration, next November, in Malta, will be more productive.

In recent weeks, the PAM President has issued several messages to our national parliaments and European MPs, calling them to mobilise their governments to reaffirm our traditional values of generosity and solidarity, and apply them through a series of courageous political decisions at both the national and regional levels. It is essential for all of us to call for cooperation on implementation of well-planned and well-managed migration policies in the affected Mediterranean countries, as well as of a determined political and military action to eliminate the growing threat posed by the terrorists of ISIS to all of us.

The meeting today appears to be one of the last opportunities offered to the decision makers from the entire world to jointly endorse a common position and secure the necessary instruments for an urgent solution of this emergency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to conclude by reiterating PAM supports for the U.N. SG's call on the leaders of several European countries, including in Central Europe, to realise that the large majority of the people arriving on our continent are refugees fleeing from war and violence. These people have a right to seek asylum without any form of discrimination. The Dublin II regulation must be changed. It is only a legal obstacle to our humanitarian obligations. As for the illegal migration, there are different legitimate options to deal with it, as wisely recalled to us by High Commissioner Guterres.

Thank you for your attention.