



SOVEREIGN ORDER OF MALTA

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Statement by H.E. Dominique Prince de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel Minister of Health and International Cooperation of the Sovereign Order of Malta

At Roundtable 6: Addressing the Vulnerability of Refugees and Migrants on their journeys from their countries of origin to their countries of arrival

United Nations, 19 September 2016

(Check Against Delivery)

Dear Chairman, Dear High Representatives,

We talk. We confer. We sign papers and accords. But now we need to implement – now we do not need words, we need actions.

We need to implement the resolutions and commitments which we - the international community, through meetings such as the World Humanitarian Summit in May this year, and the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development Goals of September last year - have agreed. We recognise that the issues of migration and refugee movements – war, poverty, climate change – are interrelated and need to be addressed by combining and linking different elements.

So let us look at the four considerations posed for this Round Table. They are all action-oriented and all deal with problems encountered in transit.

1) Human rights

Respect for human rights today is lower than at any time since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. There are many more violations, documented in chilling detail in the reports of international institutions, NGOs and the international media. We know more, therefore we must act more.

We strongly believe that no human being is illegal and therefore s/he has rights. These rights are not being respected. If you take away the status of a human being, you take away his basic rights. This is how refugees and migrants are being treated on their long and dangerous journeys.

In our reception facilities in Germany we have evidence that human beings including children are physically tortured by the traffickers on the migrant routes. We know that they do this to get more money from their relatives. They will carry these scars for the rest of their lives. We know, too, that the women are violated.

This is what happens on the migrant routes, by traffickers who are entirely unscrupulous and lawless. The fight against smugglers and traffickers must become an international obligation.

As refugees and migrant flows explode across Europe, most transit countries, overwhelmed, have reacted by nearly closing their borders – setting up strict controls and daily entry limits. We agree with the regulations, but

carried out with humane behavior. 90% of refugees and migrants are now journeying through the Libyan desert to the north African coast. There, they are herded into temporary shelters of one sort or another. Conditions are subhuman. Human dignity is nowhere. Human rights are nowhere either. There is only one motive for those who engage in this kind of activity: illegal profit.

How we can help: by applying the concept of subsidiarity, emphasising that support should always be offered at the lowest possible level, or closest to where they will have their effect. Training is key. All officials dealing with migrants and refugees at the grassroots level must be trained in human rights issues and psycho-social support.

2) Cooperation between migration authorities and child protection services

Our recommendation would be to engage the authorities in any transit country on an international basis, so that all relevant departments – social welfare, health, education, legal and security – share information and work together to protect the children, especially those who are unaccompanied.

3) How to protect women and girls and their rights?

We have discussed the concerns for women and girls in terms of their human rights.

We can also protect them better by helping them at the level closest to where they can receive support and protection.

Training is key. All officials dealing with refugees and migrants at the grassroots level must be trained in human rights issues and psycho-social support. They must be aware of the threats that particular groups face and have the mechanisms in place to deal with them.

4) Cooperating for better search-and-rescue at sea and dangerous routes. How to ensure rapid reception of persons in transit

The Order of Malta has been saving lives in the Mediterranean Sea, off Italy's southern coasts, since 2008. Working with the Italian Coast Guard, Navy and Guardia di Finanza, our medical teams have rescued over 55,000 people. In the three months at the turn of this year, following the dramatic influx of migrants from Turkey to the Greek islands, we launched a similar operation in the Aegean Sea.

Rescue is often traumatic - our volunteers are asked to play God – whom to grab desperately from the water in those vital moments, often in high seas, who is left to drown.

The coordination between the European Union Naval Force-Mediterranean Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED), the Italian forces and the NGOs and ourselves is very effective. But the resources are not enough.

And for all those who have survived, their problems do not stop on arriving on safe shores. The journey is still long and dangerous. The administrative paperwork of those in transit is never rapid. Why? Again, the facilities are overwhelmed. There are not enough trained staff to deal with the constant arrivals. Legal requirements in any asylum or host country are not processed quickly – the law does not move fast.

These processes need to be reviewed, to provide more funding, more trained personnel, an improved, less complicated, set of legal requirements for persons in transit.

Dear Chairman, Dear High Representatives, indeed we have work to do!