

ICC 29 ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
CURRENT CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION  
WEDNESDAY, 23 MARCH 2016

SESSION 4:

**REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, MIGRANTS, DISPLACED PERSONS  
AND THE ROLE OF NHRIs**

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Greek National Commission of Human Rights**

Dear friends and colleagues,

In recent times, we have witnessed millions of people losing their homes and moving across borders in search of a safer life for them and their children. These past few months these migratory flows have reached unprecedented proportions, never seen in Europe since World War II. They constitute a challenge not only to the available reception mechanisms in the countries concerned but also to the paradigm itself, shifting from an individual system of protection to the management of massive populations flows. We are fully cognizant that long-term solutions would require action from many regions across the globe and concerted efforts to address the root causes of this mass exodus of individuals. Indeed, it is to be recalled that just yesterday from this podium, we have called upon all states to contribute proportionately to sustainable development and the realisation of all human rights for all regions and all peoples, including within Europe itself.

Until such time, however, we in Europe are deeply concerned that the current management of migration flows at the European Union's borders is characterized by a serious deterioration of the internationally accepted asylum procedural safeguards, putting at risk not only the very right to asylum but also the lives of individuals, especially of vulnerable groups such as children. Even the principle of non refoulement and the prohibition of massive expulsions are challenged in practice by some of the proposals made in search for a solution to the present crisis situation. The recent agreement between the European Union and Turkey is a fair example of such an attempt, which may give rise to significant problems of implementation. Indeed, the UNHCR has just redefined its role in operations in Greece, indicating that it would not be involved in returns or detention. In this respect, may I also draw your attention to the Statement issued by the Greek National Commission for Human Rights regarding the

serious dimensions the refugee/migration problem has taken in the country, where there is an express call for the direct financing and effective functioning of the necessary structures and procedures, particularly through the creation of new decent reception and hospitality centres in Greece, including alternatives to detention. Copies of the GNCHR Statement may be found at the back of the room.

It is clear that we, the European National Human Rights Institutions, could not remain away from the situation and its repercussions. We are currently working together in collaborative projects to streamline rules, procedures and practices so as to implement in practice the European solidarity we believe should underline all responses to the migratory flows. Part of that work may be found in the Belgrade Declaration and the Thessaloniki Regional Action on the Refugee/Migrant Crisis and Human Rights. More than partial approaches, however, ENNHRI has undertaken a comprehensive effort to monitor and review all actions relevant to the management of migratory flows.

To that effect, we have revived the Working Group on Migration and Asylum chaired jointly by the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, Adriana van Doijeweert and myself, and embarked into a comprehensive programme of monitoring and review across the board. These are early days as yet, as we have just set out our plan this past February in our first meeting in Vienna but we intend to follow the asylum procedure step-by-step from the beginning to the end: from reception centres and open and closed facilities at entry points; to a thorough scrutiny and independent review of all individual applications to asylum; to sustained efforts to fully integrate refugees and other internationally protected persons to receiving societies; to monitoring any possible returns so as to ensure that no person is returned without guarantees for their right to life and protection against inhuman or degrading treatment.

ENNHRI has put the general principles of this action into a Statement on 'Human Rights concerns regarding the on-going crisis of Europe's migration system' to be released later today on the occasion of this first Conference of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. In it we reiterate our crucial role in monitoring and reporting the human rights situation, advising state bodies and protecting the rights of individuals and we urge the European Union, its member states and all relevant actors to take into account the human rights implications of all actions and promote human rights compliant responses to the current migration situation. We stand ready to cooperate fully with them to this end.

Thank you all for your kind attention.