



## Mr. Igor Ivancic

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Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is a third year that the Government of Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan Navy invite UNHCR to participate in this important Maritime Conference. UNHCR is grateful for the opportunity to offer its perspective on refugee protection and solutions in a challenging global forced displacement context.

### Global Perspective and Developments:

By the end of 2016, **65.6 million** individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. 2016 has, yet again, set a new record high figure, with some **300,000** more forcibly displaced persons on record compared to 2015. Some **22.5 million** were refugees of which **17.2 million** under UNHCR's mandate.

Allow me to share few quick highlights from UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016; please do take some time to process this information.

- During 2016 some **10.3 million** people were newly displaced by conflict or persecution; this included **6.9 million IDPs** and **3.4 million new refugees and asylum seekers**.

- Developing countries and regions hosted **84 percent** of the world's refugees under UNHCR mandate, some **14.5 million** people. A growing proportion, some **28 percent** or **4.9 million refugees**, were hosted by least developed countries.

- More than **half of all refugees** worldwide come from just three countries: Syrian Arab Republic (5.5 million), Afghanistan (2.5 million) and South Sudan (1.4 million).

- There were some **2.0 million asylum claims** worldwide with Germany (722,400), USA (262,000), Italy (123,000) and Turkey (78,600) as top recipients.

- Some **189,300 refugees** were admitted for **resettlement**; USA received the highest number (96,900).

- **Children** below 18 years of age constituted about **half of the refugee population** in 2016, similar to trends in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

1. The text in bullet points will not be read at the conference, but presented to the delegates as part of the PPT screened during the submission.

In view of such stark numbers caused by unprecedented displacement, on 19 September 2016 UN General Assembly hosted a high level **Summit for Refugees and Migrants** that aimed at improving the way in which the international community responds to large movements of refugees and migrants.

### **The New York Declaration:**

All 193 Member States of the United Nations unanimously adopted the **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants** (Resolution 71/1). Although the Declaration is not legally binding it is an expression of clear political commitment by the Member States and it addresses the situations of refugees and migrants through robust commitments that apply equally to both refugees and migrants as well as separate commitments for refugees and migrants. Today, I will refer to aspects of New York Declaration applicable to refugees in particular.

In the New York Declaration, the Member States have **recognized the unprecedented levels of displacement**; they **reaffirmed the importance of international refugee regime** highlighting the need to **fully respect the rights of refugees**; States expressed their **determination to address the root causes** of displacement; they pledged **more predictable and sustainable support to refugees**, including in education, self-reliance and basic health services, and to **communities hosting refugees**. The Member States agreed to **expand durable solutions opportunities** (through exploring additional avenues for refugees to be admitted to 3rd countries). The New York Declaration emphasizes that a **stronger international response** to refugee issues requires engagement by a much broader group of stakeholders on the onset of crisis and it calls for innovative partnerships, including with private sector, and stronger ties between humanitarian and development actions; the Declaration also highlights the **responsibility sharing** as one of the central aspects of international cooperation aimed at protecting refugees and finding solutions.

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and **Global Compact for Refugees**:

Annex I of the NY Declaration outlines the key elements of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), essentially a blueprint for international refugee protection. The objectives of the Framework are four-fold: 1) Ease pressure on host countries; 2) Enhance refugee self-reliance; 3) Expand third country solutions; 4) Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. UNHCR was called upon to develop and apply the CRRF in a range of situations and to draw on good practices from more than 65 years of its work in refugee protection, humanitarian assistance and search for solutions.

Secondly, the High Commissioner for Refugees was called upon to propose a Global Compact on Refugees during its annual report to the General Assembly in 2018. The Global Compact on Refugees will represent a global agreement on comprehensive refugee responses and it is a unique opportunity to strengthen the international refugee protection system. It will consist of the expanded Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and a **Programme of Action** that can be taken by Member States and other partners to operationalize the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and to ensure that the international community responds to large movements of refugees, including in protracted refugee situations, in the manner envisaged by the New York Declaration.

To that effect, UNHCR has been working with several countries, hosting large number of refugees that have initiated Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Honduras (informally referred as "*pilot countries*") are rolling out or applying Comprehensive Response in relation to the refugee situations in their country. Countries like Brazil and Ecuador (informally referred as "*case study countries*") are applying some elements of the Framework to their contexts. Practical experience of the application of the Comprehensive Response in these countries will be fully integrated into the lessons we draw to inform the Global Compact on Refugees. In parallel, UNHCR has commenced the global consultations and series of thematic discussions that will further inform the Comprehensive

Refugee Response Framework and Global Compact on Refugees: such as UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs held in June 2017, thematic discussion on past and current burden and responsibility sharing arrangements (July 2017); 68th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) held from 2-6 October with the special segment on application of the comprehensive refugee response framework; High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges (December 2017), etc.

Finally, the New York Declaration calls for a development of Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration. UNHCR contributes to that process, led by Member States, and works closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration, the International Organisation for Migration and other partners to ensure that two Global Compacts complement each other.

### Europe and the Mediterranean:

Distinguished delegates,

Fewer refugees and migrants entered Europe via the Mediterranean routes, taken together, during the first half of 2017 compared to previous year. Increased numbers were observed along the central Mediterranean route to Italy, with **83,752 recorded arrivals**. Number of arrivals to Spain (via Western Mediterranean route) have also increased with **6,524 persons** arriving by sea. The greatest reduction was seen in number of new arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route (via Greece) with **9,286 persons** arriving during first 6 months of 2017 (94% decrease compared to 2016).

Despite lower overall numbers, compared with recent years, routes remained equally deadly and **2,253 refugees and migrants** were estimated dead and missing during 1st six months of this year; 2,896 perished or were missing at sea during the same period in 2016. Frequent abuses, including kidnapping, torture, detention, extortion, and similar were reported along all the routes by those who managed to reach Europe.

The High Commissioner for Refugees calls for greater support for Italy and other receiving countries, stressing that **more concerted regional response** efforts are needed, including regarding implementing internal relocation plans agreed within Europe. UNHCR also stresses the need to address the **root causes of displacement** as well as the drivers of irregular migration and to take steps to address **smuggling and trafficking rings**. Renewed efforts are needed to provide protection and solutions for refugees before they set on dangerous and, too often, deadly journeys. UNHCR reiterates the vital importance of **rescue at sea** operations, as our overarching collective responsibility remains to save lives. Finally, **increasing pathways** for refugees [to protection and solutions in third countries], through resettlement and humanitarian admission but also, for instance, increased family reunification, education and other schemes directed at refugees, may give some of those who would otherwise feel compelled to move along such perilous routes with safe alternatives to doing so. In addition, safe and legal migration opportunities - for those who may not require international protection but move in search of better prospects for themselves or their families - could help to undermine demand which fuels the smuggling business.

More **effective asylum procedures and access to protection** at all points along the routes to and through Europe are also necessary, including adoption of measures to **investigate and prevent abuses at borders** reported in some countries. The ability to access fair and efficient asylum procedures and receive international protection when it is needed is strongly rooted in international law and it is essential that the institution of asylum be safeguarded and strengthened.

The High Commissioner for Refugees expressed his encouragement by the announcement of the comprehensive plan of action after the late August **Paris meeting on migration and asylum** held between several EU and African states. Welcoming this new commitment—and in particular the affirmation by States involved of the need to provide international protection to those fleeing war or persecution, Mr. Grandi noted that: *“In UNHCR's experience, measures that*

*simply aim at curbing the number of arrivals do not solve the problem (...), highlighting that, (...) Any meaningful approach must include a set of strong and determined actions to ensure a lasting peace in conflict-ridden countries as well as social and economic development in places of origin.”*

### **South and South-East Asia:**

Distinguished delegates,

Looking at South and South East Asia, the **2015** maritime movements in the **Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea** have remained disrupted, largely as a result of states’ cracking down on smuggling/trafficking networks (including interdiction efforts) and significant increases in the costs associated with these movements, but also due to greater awareness of the risks of the journey and lack of legal status at traditional destination countries (resulting in, among other things, risk of arrest and detention – even for asylum seekers and refugees). Let us also not forget that the **death toll** in Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, compared to the European maritime movements between 2013 and 2015, was actually higher in proportion to number of people on the move, with lives being lost, mostly, due to smugglers abuse and deprivation.

The absence of large-scale maritime movements does not mean that people are no longer on the move due to conflict and persecution. **Forced displacements in the region continued** through other routes – for instance over land to India, Bangladesh and Malaysia and also limited movement by air. Most notable are significant movements of Rohingya, the largest refugee population in the region, to Bangladesh following incidents in October 2016 and late August 2017. These incidents have also caused significant internal displacement. UNHCR advocates for borders to remain open and for access to people seeking safety from violence and in urgent need of assistance.

However, as the root causes, such as conflict, discrimination and persecution, remain unaddressed, and with scarce legal pathways, appropriate protection profiled responses are

necessary. Recent developments relating to the **Bali Process** have been significant. The 2016 Bali Process Declaration spoke to the need to work proactively and cooperatively to address irregular and mixed movements, including trafficking. In November 2016, here in Colombo, while reviewing the events of May 2015, States agreed to set up a Task Force on planning and preparedness to respond to mixed movements of migrants and refugees. The Task Force aims to develop the early warning capabilities of States and the capacity to coordinate operational action in response to mixed migration, including on issues such as search and rescue, disembarkation, and reception. Along with the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process and IOM, UNHCR organized a recent table top exercise on irregular and mixed migration in conjunction with the second meeting of the Task Force.

Relatedly, UNHCR, IOM and UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) jointly devised an **Immediate Responses** plan for countries affected by mixed maritime movements in the Indian Ocean. It sets out options for implementing and operationalizing proposals that have been made on the response to and protection of refugees and migrants stranded at sea, as recommended at the **Bangkok Special Meeting** on irregular migration in the Indian Ocean. This plan has been presented to Governments and a range of other stakeholders in a number of regional meetings following the 2015 situation. The Plan remains a possible blue print for action when refugees and migrants are in distress at sea and it is consistent with and complemented by the 2016 **Bali Declaration**. Together, these instruments and initiatives provide a foundation for the coordinated regional action required to manage and protect refugees and migrants at sea, in particular through:

- Identification of those with protection needs;
- Predictable and safe disembarkation options;
- Accurate data on the whereabouts of migrants and vessels stranded at sea;
- Capacity building in search and rescue operations.

## Sri Lanka:

Distinguished delegates,

In 2017, UNHCR is marking its 30th year of work and support to the Government of Sri Lanka to address forced displacement and its consequences. A lot has been initiated, especially since the end of the conflict: livelihoods; housing, land and property; water and sanitation; education; de-mining and other interventions have supported return and reintegration of hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees, allowing UNHCR to reduce its presence. However, big challenges remain as over 100,000 Sri Lankan nationals are still in refuge (primarily in Tamil Nadu India) and a number of people inside the country still awaits durable solutions to their internal displacement.

UNHCR encourages Government to operationalize the **National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict Affected Displacement**, approved by the Cabinet in August 2016. UNHCR also advocates for a bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreement with the Government of India that would enable **greater number of Sri Lankan refugees to return home** and help bringing Sri Lanka's refugee chapter to a closure through a voluntary repatriation process. While UNHCR is grateful for the necessary asylum space to those in need of international protection, it also invites stronger engagement of the Government in ensuring protection and solutions for foreign nationals seeking asylum in Sri Lanka, refugees and asylum seekers.

Together with the Government and the rest of the UN family, UNHCR committed to the pursuit of the 2030 **Sustainable Development Agenda and its Goals** whose underlying motto "(...) *to leave no one behind*" applies, for instance, to refugee children and their right to access public education; to refugees and asylum seekers and

their ability to access livelihoods and sustain dignified life; to refugees' right to be registered, documented and recognized by the relevant authority, etc.

As New York Declaration is reiterating every State, in today's complex forced displacement environment, has a role to play and it is imperative that its positive political statements are translated into concrete, affirmative actions by member States.

Distinguished delegates,

I would like to conclude my submission by quoting UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner, Mr. Volker Turk and his statement to the 69th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme held at Geneva, 28-30 June 2017.

*"In the face of growing numbers of people on the move today, responding in any meaningful way may seem like a daunting proposition. The figures for forced displacement are significant, but we must remember that we also saw high numbers as recently as in the 1990s, with large scale displacement from Afghanistan, the Great Lakes, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia. What is fundamentally different today is that we have many more tools at hand – not least of which are the New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework – more countries engaged, and many more partners who want to contribute to assist States in addressing refugee situations, which places us at an advantage."*

Allow me to once again express UNHCR's gratitude to the organizers of the Galle Dialogue, 2017; to the Sri Lankan Navy, the Ministry of Defence and the Government of Sri Lanka.

Thank you very much.