United Nations General Assembly
Seventy-first session

High-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants

Statement by

H.E. Mr. Sauli Niinistö
President of the Republic Finland

New York, 19 September 2016

(check against delivery)
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing my gratitude to the Secretary-General for organizing this meeting. The issue is of utmost importance. More than 30 000 people are forcibly displaced every day. Most of these flows stem from man-made conflicts. The scale of human suffering is heart wrenching. We face ever increasing needs for humanitarian assistance. The current humanitarian UN funding gap is 13.3 billion dollars.

Finland fully supports the initiative and leadership of the United Nations. I want to express my appreciation for the dedication and professionalism of key agencies, particularly the UNHCR and the IOM, in their responses to the current crisis.

Three inter-related issues warrant discussion. Firstly, people fleeing for their lives must be given adequate protection. I want to highlight the rights of refugee and migrant women and children. Promoting gender equality is a long-standing priority for Finland. Women and children are disproportionately affected when caught in large, uncontrolled migratory movements. Too many are subjected to violence and crimes such as human trafficking. The rights of these vulnerable groups must be respected in all settings.

In the spirit of “leave no one behind”, Finland promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities into development and humanitarian action. A recent step is The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities into Humanitarian Action, launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. Finland spearheaded the initiative and encourages all stakeholders to endorse it.
Secondly, dealing with the present refugee and migration flows is not enough. We have only seen the beginning of this phenomenon. Therefore we must urgently move beyond simply managing the flows and deal with the root-causes of uncontrolled population movements at the source.

We must increase our efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, to prevent displacement and to facilitate the voluntary and safe return of refugees. We need sustainable peace, economic growth and prospects for people in their home countries. A core issue is the promotion of human rights, rule of law and good governance. Finland does this by, for example, supporting the work of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Finally, we must keep in mind that migration is not only a problem. On the contrary, it has always been one of the key factors of development. Orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration is a resource we cannot afford to waste. While we strive to prevent forced migration and address drivers of irregular migration, we appreciate that mobility can boost economic growth and reduce poverty. We call for all member states to fully implement the Agenda 2030 in this regard.

Thank you for your attention.