



## REMARKS

# Remarks by Federica Mogherini following the meeting at political level of the European Union - African Union - United Nations - Task Force

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*Check against delivery!*

First of all, I would like to say how pleased I am to host this meeting of the Task Force that brings together the European Union, the African Union and the United Nations, and in particular the International Organisation for Migration [IOM] and the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees].

We decided to establish this [Task Force during the European Union-African Union Summit in Abidjan](#), last 28 November [2017]. It is – I believe – a turning point in our work to save and protect lives of migrants, in particular inside Libya but also along the route and dismantling the traffickers networks. As you know, this has been the objective and – I would say – the priority for the European Union and for all of us for already a long time. But it is the first time that we systematically join forces, coordinate actions in this manner.

I believe that bringing together different institutions and roles will create a completely different dynamic on the ground. We have already seen this. Because in these first 9

days of work, we have assisted almost 2,000 migrants in going back home from Libya voluntarily with the assistance of the IOM [International Organisation for Migration] and the European Union support. And this was made possible, because each of us played its role and helped accelerating the evacuation of people willing to do so. Today, we expressed our determination to accelerate our work and bring our actions to a different pace.

We committed to concrete operational follow-up, each of us with a very clear homework - if I can say so. Because each of us has a different role. And combining our functions and our strengths can continue to bring results in an accelerated manner.

We committed to join forces to achieve new objectives. But let me start with the objectives we have already achieved, because this is a turning point. The work started as far as we are concerned, exactly one year ago. On 14 December last year [2016], we were together - the IOM and the European Union, and personally the two of us - signing the European Union-IOM cooperation, exactly to support migrants inside Libya. And since then, thanks to the IOM and supported by the European Union, already 16,000 people have been able to voluntarily return from Libya to their home countries. We have worked and committed now to work even more on the reintegration projects to help them return, not only safely, but also in a dignified manner, in their communities of origin.

So, it is a work that has started one year ago, and has produced this result, 16,000 people already in one year. And now, we committed to work towards providing assistance to additional 15,000 migrants under the emergency voluntary humanitarian return by February next year [2018] - in only 2 months. We hope and we expect to manage to assist the voluntary return of 15,000 people, as we have assisted 16,000 of them in the last year, thanks to the excellent work the IOM has done with the European Union support.

Not all those that are present in Libya can be returned. There are some that are in need for international protection. This is why UNHCR is here with us in the task force because we also need and want to guarantee international protection to those that are in need of that

This is also why the European Union has mobilised Member States. We have dedicated, for the moment, 40.000 resettlement places for those in need of international protection, which will be managed by the UNHCR - so with very strict criteria and international standards.

I would also like to announce today that the European Union makes available additional 100 million euros to support the work of the IOM and the UNHCR in order to allow them to continue the operations on the ground.

But this is not enough. We need to overcome the system of systematic detention. This is the action we have taken - and were going to take - to handle the current situation of

the migrants stranded and detained in Libya. But we also have to tackle the systematic problem. And we must, first of all, allow the complete and proper registration of migrants, in order to make sure that vulnerable people and the persons in need of protection are taken care of, regardless of their nationality.

We need to prosecute the criminal groups who have smuggled and enslaved. This is why we need to address the issue of impunity and accountability in a very serious manner and together.

I spoke about all of this and the many other decisions that we took today with President [Mustafa Al-] Sarraj [Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya and Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord (GNA) of Libya] the day before yesterday to make sure that the work of this task force is done in full coordination and cooperation with the Libyan authorities. The Libyan authorities are not part of this task force but our work is strongly coordinated with them and we will make sure - I will personally make sure - that President [Mustafa Al-] Sarraj is briefed about the outcome of our discussions. And we decided to organize a joint visit of senior officials to Tripoli to have meetings with the Libyan authorities on the practical follow-up of our discussions.

I would like to stress one thing: we know very well that Libya and the Libyan people are the first victims of this situation. As we focus on the situation of migrants inside Libya, we never forget the fact that the priority number one is to support the political solution for Libya for the sake of Libyans themselves - obviously also, because this would make it easier for the international community to save lives and arrest smugglers and criminals that are trafficking human beings inside Libya. For us it is a main priority, and a joint priority, to work for a political solution of the Libyan situation and this is our main objective.

Let me finalize with one additional word on the fight against smugglers and traffickers. Also here we have achieved some results: hundreds of smugglers and traffickers were given to justice, thanks to a good cooperation - that we decided to increase today - sharing information and operating jointly from the African side and from the European side, so that our action against the criminal organizations can be more effective. And on the issue of accountability and impunity: the European Union will be ready to assist all initiatives both of the African Union and of the United Nations on this issue.

I would like to conclude with two words, not only of gratitude to the IOM, the UNHCR and their staff on the ground for the very difficult work they are doing and they will continue to do in an impressive manner, but also to the political leadership, the determination, the commitment of the Commissioner of the African Union for Social Affairs and of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, Moussa Faki, because the leadership of the our African brothers and sisters is key in this respect.

We are in this together in a true sense of partnership and I believe that this is really what can change the situation on the ground.

Finally, I will report on the work of our task force tonight at the European Council with the Heads of State and Government of the 28 Member States of the European Union, making it clear that, if we want these first initial results - important results - to be consolidated and expanded, we need all European Union Member States to do their part, both politically but also financially. And on this I hope and count on the fact that European Union Member States will fully support the work that we have prepared at this point.

## **Q & A**

***Q. You talked about the evacuation of 15,000 in the next weeks. What are the main problems for all the others detained in Libya?***

I can say a few words, but obviously [our partners from IOM and UNHCR] who are the ones on the ground can address this issue better. What we see is this. First of all, I would like to make it clear, it is 15,000 additional voluntary returns, which would bring the total number to 30,000. If I am not wrong, if you consider 2016, so last year, I think the voluntary returns were not more than 1,000. Which means that we have moved from 1,000 voluntary returns in 2016 to - if we manage - almost 30,000 in 2017/early 2018. Which means that we amplified, multiplied the assistance of voluntary returns in a manner that - I believe - no one would have believed last year, when we decided to do this. Because we want to protect lives.

Which are the difficulties? Part of the difficulty is the access to the camps, and to areas of Libya. I think my friend [William Swing] will elaborate more on that. But it is clear to everybody: Libya is a country that is suffering a major crisis, both in terms of political, environment, but also in terms of security. The second problem has been, but doesn't seem to be a problem anymore, the identification and the release of documentation, and documents for the returns. Because, obviously, member States of the African Union, countries of origin, need to be sure of who is going where. One of the aspects of our cooperation is this renewed commitment, a new commitment, from the African Union, in particular the countries of origin, to send consular staff to identify the migrants and to make sure which nationality they are. But, now we see a strong determination and will from the African side to do that. We have, as European Union, financed and we will continue to finance, as I said, with additional €100 million, the operations of the IOM and also of the UNHCR, including the flights, and including the programmes of reintegration which is an essential part of it, because we do not only want to save lives. We also want these lives to be worthwhile living, dignified, respected, and that every single person that goes back to their communities of origin can tell not only story of awful experiences that they had during the detention, during the travels, and all of us have heard terrible stories in this respect. But they can also look at the future with some hope.

So, the problems we have identified are these. We are addressing also very technical

problems like the size of the planes, or the landing permissions. But, if you look at the numbers, it is clear that the problems, and the bottlenecks that were there did not prevent the IOM, with our support, to have an impressive number of voluntary returns done this year. And the numbers of these weeks, and the plan that my friend [William] Swing [Director-General of the International Organisation for Migration] shared with me is extremely encouraging on the fact that we can reach many people. The others - there are many that are not in the centres and there are many centres that are not reachable - this is obviously something that we will need to address. As I said, our objective is to close the detention centres and make sure that they do not exist anymore in the form they exist today, and that we have a different kind of system with international standards, to manage the flows inside Libya.

***Q. Are there any conditions attached to this assistance and the money going to the Libyan government that they have to give you access as well? And underscoring all of this on December 17th, some parties in Libya on the ground are saying that the UN mandate is over and that now the army has the right to take control. What is your message to those parties who are now threatening more chaos in Libya not less?***

I would address the second part of the question, but also - let me clarify on the issue of conditionality of money: the European Union supports and finances, first of all, the work of the IOM and the UNHCR on the ground. We also finance re-integration projects in the countries of origin. All of this work happens with the trust fund we have established and to which I will tonight - again - invite our Member States to contribute. It is essential, because all of this work is possible because of the financial support that the European Union gives to the IOM and the UNHCR, which is also important for keeping the humanitarian standards high - which is a key issue for us Europeans and also for our African friends.

Then we have money that we invest in helping our Libyan friends - not related to the migration crisis or related to issues that are also relevant to the migration crisis. For instance, the border control, which is an issue that is relevant for migration but also for security and counterterrorism. Now we are focusing on migration. But when we talk about Libya, we do not only talk about migration. We talk about the political process, we talk about security issues, and we talk about a country that needs to get out of this endless crisis. And this is why, as European Union, we allocate resources also to support Libya and Libyans - from the municipalities, to the civil society, to the media environment, to the delivery of basic services - to address the needs of the Libyan population. Because - as it was said - they are in need as well and we are on their side to help them face these difficult times - and on top of these difficult times - a major migration crisis on their territory. So, this money, that the European Union dedicated to assisting Libya itself, has a component that is related to border management, both at land and at sea, and has a component that is, on the other side, addressing the social

needs, the development needs, and the needs of the population of Libya.

On the political process, I discussed this with Prime Minister [of the Government of National Accord of Libya, Fayez Mustafa al-] Sarraj the other day, as well as I discussed this with the [United Nations] Secretary General's Special Representative [for Libya Ghassan] Salamé 10 days ago in Rome.

We hoped that everybody would show restraint and responsibility around the date of 17 December. Libya does not need to go through a worsening of the political situation and of the security situation. On the contrary, Libyans - and we know that directly from the contacts we have - want to get back to a normal life and they deserve it. By the way, Libya is a rich country that should not need international help or support. But they need to find a way to unite forces and unite the country with institutions that function and that represent all the components of the society. This is what the European Union supports. We are also together with the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, and the Arab League, to support the political process in Libya. It is a Quartet for Libya that unites the African Union, the European Union, together with the UN and the Arab League, exactly to support a political solution in Libya. And, that for us it is a political priority. That is a priority number one.

## See also

[Video](#)

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