Maritime Safety Committee Meeting of IMO

London, 9 June 2015

Statement of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
by
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Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the International Maritime Organization for this initiative, which follows up on the fruitful discussion we had at the meeting on 4 and 5 March this year.

I would like to underscore that this meeting to address unsafe mixed migration by sea concerns a major and urgent crisis facing us today.

Every day brings fresh reports of ever more tragedies, of thousands of migrants undertaking perilous journeys, in the Mediterranean, in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea and other parts of the world, with many dying in the attempt.

The international community is struggling to address the crisis. High-level discussions are taking place, including at the Security Council.

On 10 December 2014, UNODC, along with UNHCR, IOM, IMO and OHCHR, has called for concerted action to address the loss of life and serious human rights violations affecting migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees traveling by sea.

We emphasized the need for closer cooperation between States of origin, transit and destination to address the drivers of dangerous sea journeys and to help identify, prosecute and punish the criminal organizations responsible for the human rights abuses and dangerous sea journeys in breach of all safety regulations.
This is in line with the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which seeks to prevent and combat migrant smuggling, promote cooperation to this end and protect the rights of smuggled migrants.

In order to achieve this, the Protocol requires States Parties to make migrant smuggling a criminal offence while protecting the rights of smuggled migrants especially those vulnerable among them that need special protection, such as women and children, refugees, and victims of crime. It also addresses international cooperation, technical assistance, document and border measures, information and prevention.

The Protocol makes clear that the offenders are not the smuggled migrants themselves, but rather the organized criminal groups behind the smuggling operations.

Looking beyond a criminal justice response, the Protocol further commits States Parties “to combat the root socio-economic causes of the smuggling of migrants, such as poverty and underdevelopment.”

This integrated and comprehensive response required by the Protocol must be founded on the principle of shared responsibility, with the engagement of the whole of the international community.

It is an incredibly complex problem, with no simple solutions.

We need to develop a multifaceted prevention strategy and join forces to urgently tackle the root causes of migration in the countries of origin through common or mutually reinforcing programmes.

However, for a prevention strategy to be effective, it needs to fully incorporate measures that would encompass holistic and equitable sustainable development in the countries of origin. The report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, which will form the
UNODC believes that for a response to migration and, in particular, to migrant smuggling and human trafficking to be effective, it must be framed within this more expansive and comprehensive context of the development debate.

In this regard, and as stated in ECOSOC resolution 2014/23, UNODC would like to underscore “the importance of promoting or strengthening, as appropriate, development programmes and cooperation at the national, regional and international levels, taking into account the socioeconomic realities of migration and paying special attention to economically and socially depressed areas, in order to combat the root socioeconomic causes of the smuggling of migrants, especially those related to poverty.”

Allow me now to say a few words on recent activities UNODC has undertaken in the Mediterranean and in South and South-East Asia.

We have developed a new strategy to contribute to international efforts and address migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean through a strategic and integrated response, including research and analysis to identify trends and flows, and gaps in responses and legislation.

UNODC is also supporting Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand through the development and mentoring of multi-agency Port Intelligence Units aimed at the disruption of Maritime migrant smuggling activities within, through and from South-East Asia, through intelligence led investigations.

We have also recently released a new Report on Migrant Smuggling in Asia in order to bridge the knowledge gap. The report analyses the smuggling of migrants in 28 states from the Middle East to the Pacific. It provides valuable information on routes, patterns and profiles of smugglers and migrants.
The report has established that criminal networks are creatively exploiting gaps between demand and regular migration, with smuggling fees to get to some destinations now reported as high as USD $50,000.

Dismantling international migrant smuggling networks and successfully prosecuting the criminals behind them while protecting migrant rights is a daunting task.

Inter-agency coordination and cooperation is essential. In this respect, IMO, IOM and UNODC are working on a joint platform to share information on smuggling of migrants at sea. This is aimed at enabling the international community to better monitor this issue.

Too often and for too long, the smuggling of migrants has been considered a “high profits - low risk” crime, and smugglers have been able to operate with impunity, generating huge profits while appalling tragedies continue to occur on a daily basis. Urgent action is necessary, and UNODC will continue to work with IMO, IOM, UNHCR, OHCHR and other UN agencies to strengthen the capacity of Member States to respond to this crime comprehensively, holistically and within the framework of sustainable development.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and I thank you.