EUROPEAN UNION

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Joint Statement on World Refugee Day

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Home Affairs, Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner for Development, and Kristalina Georgieva, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, made today the following statement:

"Today is World Refugee Day: a day of growing concern for the international community as the number of displaced people around the world soars to a dramatic new high. We can count the number of refugees – more than 46 million, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees – but we cannot quantify the human suffering, the broken families, destroyed childhoods and livelihoods that come with fleeing a war or a disaster.

In Europe, we have a particular reason to think about refugees and displaced people now that war on our doorstep has displaced more than six million Syrians, 1.6 million of whom are refugees. Alongside the efforts on the political front, the EU provides humanitarian and other assistance to the Syrians affected by the conflict, both those that still remain in Syria, and those who have fled the country. Conscious of the growing pressure on the host communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, we are also seeking to help them deal with the refugees. To date, €840 million in assistance has been committed by Member States and the European Commission. The EU has also recently announced that it will deploy an additional package of €400 million in aid for Syrians.

Another sign of Europe's lasting commitment to helping refugees is today's adoption by the EU of the final element of the Common European Asylum System, the culmination of many years of work to ensure a better, more humane treatment of those seeking protection.

It will provide better access to the asylum procedure for those who seek protection; it will lead to fairer, quicker and better quality asylum decisions; it will ensure that people in fear of persecution

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will not be returned to danger and it will guarantee dignified and decent conditions for those who seek shelter in the EU.

Our common system will put an end to the striking differences in the outcome of asylum applications across the EU. It will improve the material conditions in which asylum-seekers are received and provide common procedural rights which they are accorded. These measures will greatly increase the credibility and effectiveness of the European asylum system.

Our new laws introduce guarantees for the most vulnerable, in particular minors and victims of torture or violence; there is now specific recognition that Member States should take steps to avoid detention of asylum-seekers.

And for those who see their asylum request accepted and are therefore granted international protection, the new rules harmonise the benefits that go with such a status, especially in terms of residence rights and easier access to employment and health care.

These changes will now need to be implemented across the Union to ensure that the common standards are applied in practice.

The European Union is a union built on values. The most precious of them is solidarity towards those who have been less fortunate and who need our help to survive and live with dignity. This is why the EU will continue to lead the international community in helping displaced people around the world and in welcoming those seeking refuge from persecution and conflict. Asylum seekers entitled to protection should be offered the prospect of a decent life and the opportunity to make a contribution to our societies. We are confident that our common European asylum policy, which has just been agreed upon, will help to make that aspiration a reality."
