

**Statement for President Obama's Leaders' Summit on Refugees
20 September 2016, 15.30 – 18.30 hrs. (3 minutes)
Trusteeship Council Chamber**

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Today, more than 65 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced. Of this number, some 21 million are refugees who have fled from their homes to Europe and other regions and have become a considerable burden for first-asylum countries -- Thailand being one.

2. Over the past four decades, the Thai Government and people have shown full empathy for the plight of these people, and have provided humanitarian assistance to more than one million displaced persons from neighbouring countries.

3. Thailand has always provided shelter to displaced persons fleeing conflict along the border area, the numbers for which reached almost 500,000 twenty years ago and are now at about 100,000. We also provide assistance to more than 3 million irregular migrants and foreign workers.

4. Thailand is therefore pleased that, yesterday, the global community jointly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

5. Out of concern for fellow human beings, the Thai Government has put in place several measures. These include improving law enforcement and allocating a yearly budget of about 180 million US Dollars – equal to about 0.05 % of our GDP – to provide the displaced with access to healthcare,

education and legal assistance in criminal cases – in the same way provided to Thai nationals.

6. Thailand is also considering the development of an international standard screening system to reduce the risks of such persons becoming victims of trafficking. We also allow trafficking victims or witnesses to trafficking cases to work legally in Thailand until their cases conclude. And even so, they may continue to live and work in Thailand for a period not exceeding two years for the benefit of the case.

7. The Government also provides education and skills training to displaced persons in shelters to ensure a good living once they return home and issues birth certificates to all children born of displaced persons.

8. We are discussing with our neighbouring country the voluntary return of the first pilot group of displaced persons in a manner that will ensure their well-being once back at home.

9. And Thailand is in the process of enacting the Act on Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance to strengthen implementation of the principle of non-refoulement.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. I wish to thank President Obama for recognizing Thailand's role in addressing the issue of forcibly displaced persons which we have done – to the best of our abilities given our resource and other constraints – as well as for inviting Thailand to this meeting.

11. It is indeed the shared responsibility of the international community to resolve this issue together while at the same time ensuring that all countries – whether of origin, transit or destination – are given the policy space to address the issue in line with their own national circumstances.

12. We must sympathise with, and give development assistance to, countries of origin, so that the people of those countries will not have to leave their homes. We should also not put unnecessary pressure on them. And if they are not ready, to undertake certain actions, then assistance from outside parties should be given them.

13. Countries of transit, which are, in many cases, first-asylum countries, must be part of the policy-making process to resolve this issue, and should be given additional financial and other assistance, especially as concerns policy, law enforcement, the prosecution of cases against the abuse and exploitation of the displaced as well as ensuring that first-asylum countries do not become harbours for human trafficking networks, which is complicated problems connected to other problems.

14. Countries of destination must increase their assistance too. Thailand is pleased that these countries have committed to increasing refugee resettlement quotas. But they should also give financial assistance, take part in improving the well-being, and build the capacity, of refugees. They should also work with the UNHCR to expedite the screening and resettlement process which is not only what refugees want, but will also alleviate their suffering and reduce the burden on all parties concerned. And if third country resettlement is not possible, then other measures should be expedited, to help take the burden off countries of transit.

15. Indeed, the obligation to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced persons is not mine alone, nor yours alone, but it is ours together – because

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we must not leave anyone behind. And given Thailand's experience as a country of transit, we know well the operational-level issues associated with sending displaced persons back or resettling them in third countries. So I request the meeting to make clear distinction in our continuing discussion between 1) irregular migrants fleeing from poverty and war and 2) illegal migrants so that we can address both groups effectively.

16. And last but not least, I wish President Obama all the best and continued success after his term in office. I commend him for his leadership on the issue of refugees, maintaining peace and promoting humanitarianism around the world.

17. Thank you.

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