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Statement by H. E. Mr. Yury Fedotov, Director-General of the United Nations Office in Vienna (UNOV) and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Mr. Speaker,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean,
Under-Secretary General Moeller,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to the 10th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss political perspectives and developments in the Mediterranean. Today's debate resonates not just in the Mediterranean, but also outside the region.

The Mediterranean has always stood at the crossroads of numerous types of trade, but today, the region also stands at a very different crossroads.

One that sees the large scale movement of people, as well as the trafficking of a broad range of illicit goods.

Countries in North Africa confront illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and people, as well as contraband such as cigarettes and other products.

Across the Sahel vast areas of territory is controlled by armed militia and terrorist groups. The result is a growing nexus between terrorists and violent extremists and criminal organizations.

Groups such as ISIL and Boko Haram use funds from crime to commit fresh atrocities. Women, children and men are also being callously exploited in the territories where these groups dominate.

The Mediterranean is also a transit region for illicit drugs to western and Central Europe. This includes heroin via the Balkans, cannabis resin trafficking from Morocco to Spain, and cocaine destined for Europe that has crossed West Africa.

It is in the area of migrant smuggling, and the interconnected crime of human trafficking, that we are witnessing some of the most tragic and distressing developments in the Mediterranean.

More than 1 million migrants arrived in Europe by crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, while thousands more died attempting to make this perilous journey. This includes refugees fleeing war and persecution.

A large number of the migrants have placed their lives in the hands of smugglers and are vulnerable to exploitation and victimisation, especially women and children.

All these very different, but often connected activities, pose severe challenges for countries in the region.

UNODC's response to supporting countries is threefold: political commitment among governments; strengthened partnerships, both within and outside the UN system, and integrated support through our global network of offices and regional programmes.

UNODC offers nations technical advice and capacity building, and promotes international cooperation in the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling networks.

In 2015, UNODC drafted its own strategy to address the smuggling of migrants in the Mediterranean, which includes research on trends and routes, capacity building and trans-regional cooperation.

This strategy was complemented by the development of a regional strategy in the Sahel region, and we are working on promoting judicial cooperation in Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso.

These efforts embrace the rule of law, anti-terrorism and corruption prevention, as well as the need to combat organized crime and track criminal proceeds.

The EU and UNODC recently launched a Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants. The plan focuses on migrant smuggling in countries in all geographic regions, including the Southern Mediterranean, and Eastern Europe.

UNODC will also take part in September's High-Level Summit on "Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants" promoted by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General has outlined five priority areas, including managing large flow and protecting human rights. He has also stressed that the "Criminal networks must be brought to justice".

But to do this, we must build greater connectivity and linkages between the various bodies engaged in sharing informations and conducting joint operations against the criminals.

Last year, our "networking the networks" approach launched a new Global Programme on Building Effective Networks Against Transnational Organized Crime – BENATOC.

BENATOC is focusing on improving operational structures and practices, enhancing information exchange and operational cooperation, and improving training for personnel.

Alongside these efforts, UNODC helps policymakers and law enforcement agencies to effectively and efficiently respond to the threat posed by all forms of organized crime.

By connecting UNODC initiatives in West and Central Asia, South-Eastern Europe, the Gulf region and East Africa, as well as other regions we aim to support countries in adapting to changes in criminal behaviour.

UNODC is also maximising its other key activities by encouraging the adoption and full implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, including its protocols on human trafficking, migrant smuggling and firearms, the UN Convention against Corruption, and universal instruments on terrorism.

Let me say that I welcome the Parliamentary Assembly's work on tackling corruption. UNODC is committed to reducing corruption and bribery as part of its overall work to deliver on goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although the migrant crisis is driven by a number of factors, organized crime has swiftly moved to exploit the weak and the vulnerable. The result is death and tragedy in the Mediterranean.

The truth, therefore, is that crime in the Mediterranean, as elsewhere, has successfully insinuated itself into our globalised world. It also haunts the wars and conflicts of this world, and is ready to take advantage wherever possible.

This necessitates a profound change in the way we think about drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism. It also calls for us to promote greater awareness about the impact of crime in the Mediterranean region.

If we are to achieve successes against crime, we must alter our operations to reflect these challenges. And, we must also work to ensure that progress in sustainable development, as laid out in the 2030 Agenda, is protected.

Once again, I congratulate the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean for encouraging debate and discussion on this important matter.

Thank you.