

PAM 10th Plenary Session

Tirana, Albania, 18 February 2016

Statement by Mr. Peter van der Auweraert, Senior Regional Expert on Humanitarian Affairs and Transitional Programming of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – audio transcript

Thank you very much, thank you for this venue, thanks also for inviting me,

I think a number of my colleagues have already said it, but I would repeat it again. I think that the PAM is an excellent forum to discuss the issues around the refugee and migration crisis around the Mediterranean, because the only solution that we have is more solidarity and more collaboration. We are seeing now in Europe, and my colleagues from UNHCR alluded to that, some countries which will try to go by themselves and implement unilateral measures. We also see that this does not provide an answer to the challenges that we all face. I think that the PAM is a very good forum to discuss migration, especially ongoing migration, and refugee crisis around the Mediterranean.

We only have a few minutes so I will make a few points.

First, I think that, and two of my colleagues said it, there are three countries that need to be commended for the number of refugees and migrants that are currently hosting: Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. They have done, and are doing, an enormous amount of work to accommodate people that are fleeing the Syrian crisis. In very difficult economic circumstances, people are giving the right to work, for example in Turkey, which it is very important. Countries like Jordan and Lebanon, that do not have enormous resources, are allocating a huge number of resources trying to provide as good as they can, with the support of the international community, shelter and protection to people fleeing conflicts. I think it is very important in Europe that we keep in mind that the burden of the Syrian crisis in particular does not mostly lay in Europe. It lies in the countries around that, and I think that's very important. When we discuss budgets and so on measures, in an another context, we have to make sure that Europe, as part of our response, provides financial support to those three countries, to help them and to assist the population there and not just because we do not want people to come here, but also because we do have a moral obligation to do this.

The second point I want to make, and my colleague from the UNHCR refer to, the changing political discourse in Europe about migration. I apologise for people from the other side of the Mediterranean, that the rest of what I am going to say is in somewhat Eurocentric, but that is because the work I am doing, and I will be very blunt: no matter what some politician are saying, migration is not going away. It is not something it can be stopped, you can organize it better, and

I think this crisis really shows how important it is to manage migration properly. Because I cannot help to think that all the anti migration sentiments in Europe is yes because people are arriving but it is also because there is the sense that governments do not have this population movements under control. I wonder, if we would have exactly the same number of people, but if we would have been done so in an organized fashion, whether some of all those anti migration sentiments would not have been a lot less and a lot less vocal. I think and I see it in my own environment when I speak to my grandmother and I speak to my family in Belgium: people are afraid, because people have the sense that things are out of control. So I think, yes management, but stopping migration does not work. We have seen it here in the Western Balkans: three nationalities only can now move through to Macedonia because restrictions imposed in Austria, has that stopped others nationalities from going into Macedonia and trying to come to Europe? No, it just means that people have used different roads, have paid lots of money to smugglers, to criminal gangs to move forward. So migration cannot be stopped, and I think that it is something really important as parliamentarians, when you are discussing legislation, to keep that in mind it: is a matter of how do we better organize them.

I think the last point, given the time that we have, and sometimes, when you read the press you think that there is one solution to address this ongoing crisis and I think that my colleague from UNHCR has already said it there is no one silver bullet. It is not going to be relocation that is going to, in somehow, manage this. It is not going to be building a fence around the country that is going to manage. It is not going to be resettlement from Turkey, in itself very important, that is going to resolve the whole issue. I think one of the outside of the political sensitivity of migration in Europe and the difficulties for different countries with very different type of governments to come together around a common approach is that dealing with this crisis requires interventions a many number of very different fields, involving different ministries, involving different silos of policy making, that, somehow have to be brought together and work together to resolve this crisis. It needs to involve the ministry of Social Affairs for integration; it needs to involve the ministry of Foreign Affairs for counsellor services; it needs to involve the ministry of interior for border management. So all these ministries inside one country need to come together and I think organizations like this one, and parliamentarians in general, can do a lot to bring more of a holistic approach to this issue.

I would like to end with one maybe generality, but I think it is really important. We have to think in the Mediterranean about migration beyond this particular crisis. We have to stop thinking of migration as a problem or as a negative issue and we have to start having a dialogue across counties in the next 20 or 30 years, given some of the challenges that Toby Lanzer highlighted in the Sahel region, in terms of population growth, access to economic opportunities it is not so dissimilar from some of the countries that from the other side from the Europe and Mediterranean. We need to start having a dialogue on what type on migration policy we can

develop together in Europe and the other side of migration policy that would benefit both the ageing societies in Europe and the young societies on the other side of the Mediterranean that have a lot of talent and energy to offer.

Thank you very much.