

Position of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights on the occasion of World Refugee Day

Every 2 seconds a person is displaced.

Based on the data cited by the United Nations concerning the magnitude of the refugee crisis, 41.3 million people are displaced in their own country, 25.9 million are refugees, 3.5 million are asylum seekers, 44400 people a day are forced to leave their homes due to war and armed conflict, but also because of a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, political beliefs, ethnicity or participation in a particular social group.

People on the move, people in constant motion are faced with deadly dangers in their quest for a new homeland, a new hope.

Families, men, women, children leave their ancestral homes heading to an unknown tomorrow, having to face a thorny path full of risk and possible losses.

Refugee flows constitute one of the greatest humanitarian crises that humanity is facing within the last decades. Beyond the violent displacement and the difficulties that they have to face, they often find themselves in inhospitable countries, where they experience racist attitudes, violations of their human rights and are treated as a threat.

The European Union itself, recognizing the extent and intensity of the refugee crisis, has set a package of measures and initiatives, in cooperation with both Member States and other partner countries, aiming at managing the flows of people seeking international protection. However, despite the principles of solidarity and mutual trust among the EU Member States, which share common democratic values, the refugee problem has unfortunately revealed the "pathogens" of modern societies, which have brought to the surface strong signs of suspicion, racist speech and bigotry towards immigrants, as well as restraint to any possibility of hospitality.

In Cyprus, both asylum seekers and refugees, as recorded and noted in our recent Reports, often face serious problems in their everyday lives, from finding housing to accessing the labor market, to the amount of the allowances, but also their conditions of living, in general. It is our role to continue to intervene where there is a violation or insufficient protection, as well as any limitation on the exercise of human rights.

In a semi-occupied country such as ours, expatriation is part of our existence. We have experienced the war and we bear the expulsion and its consequences even to this day. We should be the first to teach that expatriation is not a social burden. It is a consequence of a violent force and it requires the support of

everyone in order to recover the lost land that has redeemed our soul, their soul.

As UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, has said: “**No one becomes a refugee by choice; but the rest of us can have a choice about how we help.**”

Today was marked as World Refugee Day on 4th December 2000, by a decision of the UN General Assembly and it was celebrated for the first time on 20th June 2001.

This day is not considered – or should not be considered – as a mere reminder of the refugee crisis, nor does it pay tribute to those who have been forced to leave their homes, their neighborhoods and their homelands.

This day is an indication for humanity’s debt to all people. A suggestion that every day – and not just today – should be a milestone for mutual respect, for solidarity, for our coexistence, with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially of all those innocent children, because “... if the child is saved, there is hope ...”¹.

¹ Pavlos Sidiropoulos