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AHRI Belgrade Declaration on the Refugee Crisis in Europe

The EU faces a historic test this week to address the refugee crisis. The special sessions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council and of the European Council offer a unique opportunity to show leadership. Having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 and priding itself on its deep commitment to fundamental values such as human dignity, human rights, equality, solidarity and the rule of law, the EU bears a heavy responsibility to come up with more workable solutions. Let us not forget that the EU guarantees the right to asylum in its own Charter of Fundamental Rights.

As a global network of academic human rights institutes, the Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI) has a responsibility to point European policy-makers towards a number of considerations.

We insist that this crisis requires a common response. Member States should not take any unilateral action to keep out or to remove refugees from their territory. The erection of insurmountable barriers, both physical and procedural, is neither in conformity with international law, nor is it an effective response to the current situation. The EU should seize this moment to deepen European cooperation within a fundamental rights-based framework. This involves, first of all, making use of existing mechanisms, including the principles of solidarity and financial compensation outlined in the Directive on Temporary Protection. Secondly, a more equitable framework for distributing asylum obligations among Member States, with stronger financial incentives, should be created. Thirdly, the Commission should use all available oversight mechanisms to ensure full and uniform implementation of existing standards. Last but not least, the EU should transform the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) into a fully-fledged European Asylum Agency, in order to ensure joint operational responses.

For the right to seek asylum to remain meaningful, Member States must provide effective legal access to a

proper asylum procedure. This includes providing alternative access to asylum procedures outside the EU, in order to end the dependence of refugees on perilous, unofficial transit routes. In addition, the issuing of humanitarian visas and the introduction of the ability to apply for asylum at EU Delegations needs to be considered. Finally, the implementation of an effective common European resettlement policy is necessary in order to assist those third countries currently housing the greatest numbers of refugees.

Belgrade, 21 September 2015