***Delegation from Represented by***

**The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia University of Heidelberg**

***Position Paper for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees***

As member of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR*)*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia), fully supports the protection of the welfare and rights of refugees as core principal of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951 Convention). Thus, Macedonia stresses the importance of the following issues: I. Promoting Livelihoods and Education for Refugees and Displaced Persons; II. Addressing Protracted Displacement; and III. Environmental Migration and the Future of Displacement.

**I. Promoting Livelihoods and Education for Refugees and Displaced Persons**

Europe’s refugee crisis gravely affects Macedonia, as it is the main transit point for more than 700.000 migrants heading from Greece and the Balkans trying to reach Central Europe. As a country that is highly affected by the increasing number of asylum seekers, Macedonia is alarmed about the lack of capacity to ensure their protection. Hence, Macedonia’s government was forced to declare a state of emergency and to close its borders on March 8th, 2016. Currently, the precarious situation within Macedonia’s borders impedes the promotion of livelihoods and education enormously. **Nationally**, Macedonia works closely with the UNHCR and other UN agencies in order to coordinate the continuous influx of refugees, reforming the border management system and building the two transit centres in the country, Tabanovce and Vinojug. **Regionally**, Macedonia is supported by the European Commission, which provided humanitarian aid as emergency assistance. Trained information assistants provide information to refugees on available services at the transit centers in Macedonia. **Internationally**, Macedonia has adopted the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) as well as theHuman Rights Council resolution 8/4 (2008) on “The right to education,” which outlines the importance of providing free and compulsory education to all refugees. Taking this into account, Macedonia considers the basic rights of education and livelihoods for refugees and displaced persons as indispensable elements of Article 22 of the *1951 Convention.* Acknowledging with deep gratitude all the efforts that have already been made by the UNHCR and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Macedonia calls upon all Member States to cooperate in finding a consistent policy. In the **short-term**, it is important for Macedonia to manage their border situation and the security risks by rerouting the flow of refugees and trying to disperse them into other countries to strengthen the provision of services. Over the **medium-term**, Macedonia considers to develop an Application for Smartphones and Tablets consisting of learning materials and online teaching programs in languages of origin and in English to ensure education for refugees who are on the move. Therefore, internet connectivity has to be improved and devices have to be provided. Macedonia further encourages all Member States to take an active part in the funding of schools, universities as well as online learning programs – considering the 2016 Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe- by creating a bigger pool of private and public funds through the integration of more private donors, UN organizations and charities. As a **long-term** solution, Macedonia recommends to further develop the already existing idea of Learn Lab by the UNHCR, which expands educational opportunities for refugees using new approaches to learning. Thus, Macedonia intends to create a program named *“Education for Integration Program”* (EFIP)consisting of training sessions for local teachers and volunteers, cultural classes and language lessons as well as safe learning environments. Macedonia proposes its funding by international organizations such as the World Bank in accordance with the Executive Committee of the High Commissioer’s Programme. Once the foundation is set, it is of utmost importance to make use of the benefits of technology-based learning by utilizing online platforms, e-books and smartphones to allow refugees to connect and interact through open-source learning. In order to identify the refugees’ education level considering age, gender and diversity, a specific placement test should be done. Finally, Macedonia is working to achieve a full integration of refugees into communities and encourages the international community to press onward when it comes to the promotion of livelihoods and education.

**II. Addressing Protracted Displacement**

The record-high numbers of protracted displaced persons gravely concern Macedonia, especially as many of them are facing multiple barriers such as the lack of basic needs and human rights as well economic opportunities. In awareness of these protracted refugees, Macedonia seeks a durable solution to prevent and to astutely solve these issues in the near future, recognizing that ensuring the welfare and protection for protracted displaced persons is core of the SDGs. **Nationally**,working closely with the UNHCR, other UN agencies and local NGOs, Macedonia has developed an “Integration Strategy for Refugees and Foreigners” to urge the implementation of national action plans. Moreover, the government is aligning its asylum and legal framework by building a fair and efficient asylum system and by continuing advocacy with national authorities.

**Regionally**, the Response Plan to Europe’s Refugee Emergency by the UNHCR is highly appreciated by Macedonia and should be expanded to further implement partners with training, technical advice, capacity-building activities and financial aid. **Internationally**, Macedonia has adopted the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* on September 19th, 2016 outlining a “Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework” designed to provide effective solutions in any cases of large refugee movements by providing immediate support in admission, protection, health and education. Bearing this in mind, Macedonia reaffirms the importance of ensuring legal and administrative assistance as well as rapid and free access to basic needs such as shelter, food, water and medical care. Expressing its deep appreciation for the *#IBelong Campaign* established by the UNHCR and the fruitful collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Macedonia suggests to establish additional awareness campaigns, using Twitter, Facebook and the Media, aiming to change existing views and behavior regarding protracted displacement and statelessness. At the same time, it could increase the number of donors and hence increase existing funds in the **short-term**. Over the **medium-term**, following the example of the *IKEA Foundation*, cooperations with more private sector partners are important to further provide impactful financial aid. Macedonia proposes to establish a fundraising team using the help of external private sector fundraising experts to increase the income and to generate greater awareness of the refugee cause. In the **long-term**, granting identification papers and therefore ensuring refugees and displaced persons the right of free movement as well as access to education and the labor market, is the key to self-reliance and to the long-term goal of achieving an overall social integration and inclusion of refugees and displaced persons into the community. Hence, the support of UN agencies, employers, charities and community-based organizations is needed. Macedonia urges the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in collaboration with NGO’s to create a document named “Need Analysis” which should represent the number of expected protracted displaced persons, the duration of their stay and their special needs in order to better coordinate the humanitarian services needed. Moreover, it is important to highlight the need of legal assistance to obtain documents such as identification papers or register civil acts. Therefore, Macedonia calls upon the lawyers from the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association to serve the needs pro bono providing legal support. In conclusion, customized approaches are needed to empower protracted displaced persons to live with dignity while forming a part of their host countries’ society.

**III. Environmental Migration and the Future of Displacement**

Faced with its own precarious situation due to the large number of incoming migrants, Macedonia recognizes the need for immediate action to prevent future mass migration crises. As climate change poses one of the greatest security threats today, the risk of future migration crises caused by climate change is significantly high. Still, the United Nations’ *1951 Convention* and the *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1967) do not provide long-term legal protection to refugees due to environmental change as of now. Therefore **nationally**, Macedonia appreciates and actively supports efforts of the UNHCR in raising environmental awareness and is actively integrating climate change into Macedonia’s national strategic plans as a first step of mitigating future challenges. **Regionally**, Macedonia recognizes that only raising awareness of environmental migration is insufficient to prevent future crises. Therefore, special attention has to be placed on further developing disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies for potentially affected countries, for example enhancing the environmental resilience of refugees and displaced persons and supporting emergency responses as already put into practice by the UNHCR. **Internationally**, Macedonia welcomes the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* in recognizing the effects of climate change and environmental factors as a possible cause of migration. However, there is still no legal protection for displaced persons, refugees or migrants due to environmental changes. Therefore in **short-term**, reaffirming the purpose and principles of the *Charter of the United Nations* and the *Declaration of Human Rights*, Macedonia stresses the importance of integrating “environmental migrants” into international refugee law to effectively address the evolving needs of modern-day refugees. Macedonia supports the already universally accepted working definition by the IOM into international law: „Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad”. In **medium-term** the international community shouldprovide assistance to climate change hotspot regions to increase their resilience. Macedonia suggests the development of emergency action plans on an international level, providing immediate and effective support on-site. As main goal and **long-term** solution, Macedonia targets the development of an “*Environmental Migration Relocation Strategy”* (EMRS). This strategy should include the localization of “safe rescue areas”. Therefore, Macedonia recommends to further develop site planning approaches using advanced technology like satellite imaginery in identifying sites that are least prone to environmental threats and provide not only safe but dignified homes for persons of concern. The financial and material preparation of these safe rescue areas should be funded by private-public partnerships in order to enable the accommodation of affected population and prevent further displacement.