



14.03.2016 – The High Commissioner, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, is in Brussels for talks with senior officials of the European Union ahead of the two-day EU Summit which begins on 17 March.

Mr. Zeid told a press conference organized by UNRIC, the UN Regional Information Centre in Brussels, that he is interested in hearing how the EU envisages addressing the refugee crisis in line with refugee law and human rights standards.

“I want to look at the disgraceful and shameful bigotry and xenophobia expressed by a great number of politicians. Europe’s achievements in the last 70 years have been colossal. Europe is one of the strongest continents in defending the Human Rights Framework we have built over time,” he said.

“The gross irresponsibility expressed by politicians who seek to distort or pervert the realities that we see in a way that will serve them politically and serve their very narrow agenda I think is lamentable,” he added.

He went on to say that, like High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, he was very concerned about last week’s proposal to return all refugees and migrants from Greece to Turkey in return for higher resettlement.

According to press reports the EU has proposed to resettle one Syrian refugee from camps in Turkey in exchange for every Syrian that Turkey takes from Greece.

Mr. Zeid said that the UN had not seen the detailed proposals and that he understands they may change.

“The first observation is that everyone must receive an individual assessment of his or her protection needs. Otherwise it will amount to blanket returns which we believe are prohibited by international, and EU or let’s say European law.”

The High Commissioner said that he had great respect for Turkey for hosting a large number of refugees from Syria, but if Turkey was to be designated a “safe third country” it would have to give not only temporary “but full refugee status and this possibility doesn’t seem to exist at the moment for Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans.”

“I would be very interested to hear from my interlocutors, what the explanation will be, because at least in the form that the proposal has been presented it seems to be clearly at odds with EU law .“

The High Commissioner for Human Rights also addressed the closure of borders in the Western-Balkans. He said that the closures were designed to restore order.

“But this is not what we see in the images of makeshift camps on the Greek side of the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,“ Mr. Zeid told the press conference.

“What we see is a human crisis. Many of these people have been through horrific experiences in Syria and elsewhere. Now, they are desperately waiting in the cold wet camps, their children are sick, and certainly Europe does not seem to have any message other than “Go away.”

Mr. Zeid also condemned recent terrorist attacks in Turkey and Cote d’Ivoire and said they were “despicable.”

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