**AWARE**

**Nicosia, 30 March 2017**

1. It is my pleasure to be here with you for the launch of the “AWARE” campaign. A campaign to raise the awareness of the Cypriot public about who the refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants living in their midst are, why they came here, and how the two sides can learn from each other, accommodate each other and live peacefully together.
2. Cyprus is a relatively new refugee-receiving country, though economic migrants have been coming here in larger numbers since the mid-1980s. Around 160,000 immigrants, according to one Eurostat report I have seen. That is nearly 20 percent of the population. The second highest in the EU after Luxembourg.
3. This number also includes the refugees Cyprus has received since 2002: Some 1,075 granted refugee status and another 6,890 accorded what is known in the EU as subsidiary protection (some call it the “little refugee status”). That’s a total of 7,965 people who received the protection of Cyprus over the course of 12 years. About 1 percent of the population. Some say it is a big burden. I say it is a modest proportion when compared, for example, to Lebanon, where one in four people is a Syrian or Palestinian refugee.
4. We are obviously pleased with the progress Cyprus has made in implementing its international legal obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. UNHCR’s role, in accordance with the mandate given to it by the United Nations General Assembly, is to ensure the proper application of these treaties. To ensure that those who meet the criteria set out in the Convention get refugee status. To ensure that subsidiary protection does not become a substitute to full refugee status, which has been the trend in Cyprus including for Syrians. To ensure that the process is both fair and quick, which has also been quite a challenge in Cyprus.
5. And certainly to ensure that refugee applicants are treated in accordance with basic human standards and dignity. Conditions at the Kofinou Reception Centre leave a lot to be desired. But asylum-seekers living outside the Reception Centre – and they are the vast majority – face the most serious difficulties for their livelihoods.
6. If they can’t work either because they could not find a job or have health problems (they can only work in sectors that are at the lowest end of the pay scale – in farms, animal husbandry, garbage collection and the like), the social assistance they receive from the government is less than half of MGI – *the Minimum Guaranteed Income*. MGI for a single person is €760 per month. For an asylum-seeker, he/she only receives €320 per month for everything (food, clothing, rent, utilities, transportation, etc.). According to the Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus, the risk-of-poverty threshold in 2015 was €690 per person per month.
7. The other area requiring greater attention is the integration of refugees. Granting refugee status to a person is only a point of departure, the *alfa* but not the *omega*. If there is no investment in integration, refugee status becomes rather meaningless. If refugees are received by welcoming societies, accepted for who they are, are seen as equals and given the chance to engage fully in all aspects of community life, integration can be achieved and cohesive societies built.
8. Effective integration would require that reception policies for asylum-seekers are designed to promote social inclusion, rather than isolation and separation from host communities. It would also require that all refugee and asylum-seeking children attend school. And access to language and orientation courses, vocational training and job placement programmes should be ensured for all.
9. Naturalization remains the most potent measure of integration. Family reunification is very essential to integration. It is difficult for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection alike to rebuild their lives without the support of their families.

1. Integration should also include effective strategies and educational programmes to promote the virtues of tolerance, inclusion, multiculturalism, diversity, and mutual respect. These values need, of course, to be taught in schools, upheld in the home and at the workplace, and practiced in daily civic life.
2. Many societies have a strong hospitality ethic – which is of great benefit to refugees and migrants. But most societies also have a built-in mistrust or fear of the foreigner in their midst. Even if it is human to be suspicious of “the other,” intolerance of other races, religions, ethnic groups and political systems should not be tolerated beyond a certain point.
3. Refugees are victims of intolerance by definition. It is usually some sort of political, social, religious or ethnic intolerance that forces them to flee their own country for fear of persecution. Unfortunately, they are increasingly victims of intolerance in asylum countries as well as we have witnessed with the arrival of the 1.2 million refugees and migrants in 2015 and the first months of 2016. Many lost their lives or saw loved ones perished at sea in their attempt to reach safety in Europe. The simple truth is that refugees would not risk their lives on a journey so dangerous if they could thrive where they are.
4. Hate speech is one of the most worrying forms of racism and intolerance prevailing across Europe in the digital age. We are witnessing a veritable explosion of hate on the Internet. It is the responsibility of all, and political leaders in particular, to effectively counter this disturbing phenomena through education and positive public discourse promoting equality, and respect for diversity and difference. To spread the common values underpinning the international law of human rights – values that speak to us all, regardless of our national identities, gender, religious backgrounds, status or sexual orientation.
5. The media, as influential opinion-makers and shapers, also have a key role to play. There are indeed few non-governmental institutions that wield so extensive and huge power and influence as the media. The media bear significant responsibility for informing the public and raising awareness on a wide range of issues if they report properly, that is if they give the facts, avoid bias, and provide context. But the media can also be misused to manipulate, distort, stigmatize or stereotype. The influence of the media can therefore often make or break national policy.
6. This is a time where refugees need us more than ever. And as part of our shared values, and to meet our moral and international legal obligations to protect refugees, we have a duty to foster a climate of understanding and empathy towards the uprooted and disenfranchised. We need to make concerted efforts to face those who demonize refugees, those who view diversity as a threat, those who incite hatred for the “others.” I have no doubt that the AWARE project will make an important contribution in this respect. We stand ready to support the project in any way we can.

**Thank you**.