



GLOBAL
PROGRESSIVE
FORUM



'Working together to address the refugee crisis'

Beirut, Lebanon, on 30-31st October 2015

Declaration

We have come together as progressives in Lebanon to address the challenges posed by the refugee crisis. In the last months and years we have seen a sharp increase in refugees crossing water and land to reach the EU. While the EU has received about 500,000 refugees, this holds no comparison to the millions being hosted in neighbouring countries. Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey bear the biggest brunt and deserve our utmost support. Our fundamental values of humanism, solidarity and human rights have been tested. Despite the resurgence of nationalist and xenophobic movements, which are opposite to our fundamental progressive values, the EU has agreed on a common approach, in solidarity with neighbouring countries, to ensure that those fleeing gruesome wars receive adequate protection.

Protection starts at home. **First and foremost, we must ensure that Syrians living in Syria have access to humanitarian assistance.** Syrian citizens should have access to food, health and education services. We need to continue investing in Syrians remaining in Syria and make all efforts necessary to avoid further disintegration of the country. Furthermore, a **political transition needs to be set in motion that will eventually give way to a cease fire and a more structural framework for peace.** To that end, all actors involved in the conflict and Syria need to move passed national interests and work towards a solution facilitated by the UN. The same applies to Iraq, Libya and Yemen, where conflicts are often driven by opposing global powers and interests.

Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have nearly reached their saturation point. The vast amount of refugees per capita, especially in Jordan and Lebanon, affects the economic situation in these countries and causes an often skewered relationship between the local population and incoming refugees. Both a rise in unemployment and simmering tensions are dangerous ingredients which could lead to more violence and further destabilisation of the region. The EU has made a number of pledges to support host countries, in particular through funds such as the Madad fund (the EU's Regional Trust Fund for Syria). These pledges need to be fulfilled immediately. As

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Progressives, we will insist that our leaders comply with promises made. At the same time we encourage the authorities from hosting countries to continue to do their utmost to offer protection to refugees at this critical time.

We cannot forget the plight of the **Palestine refugees**. Currently about 45,000 Palestine refugees from Syria reside in UNRWA camps in Lebanon. They are among the most vulnerable refugee populations. **Palestine refugees should not be treated differently from all other refugees reaching new countries. They are entitled to equal levels of protection.**

In order to increase stability we should not only address immediate needs, but also look at larger destabilising factors. The MENA region is in urgent need of an economic stimulus package. Poverty and unemployment are compelling recruitment arguments for extremist militias such as the Islamic State. The Middle East and North Africa are among the youngest regions in the world. **As long as we cannot provide a future for our youth, they will seek opportunities elsewhere. As progressives we need to take all necessary measures to ensure that people have decent work and social standards.** Increased cooperation between the EU and MENA region could facilitate that.

Together with our progressive partners, we commit to:

- Advocate for full humanitarian access to those providing aid to Syrians.
- Support the efforts of the High Representative and facilitate a UN led negotiation amongst the main parties concerned, namely the countries involved in the Vienna talks, in order to define a common space necessary to initiate a political transition for Syria.
- Encourage our leaders to work towards a framework of peace in Syria as well as in Yemen, Iraq and Libya.
- Comply fully with pledges made.
- Ensure the plight of Palestine refugees remains firmly on the agenda.
- Work together with countries of the Middle East and North Africa to develop a comprehensive social and economic stimulus package to allow for sustainable growth and decent work in the region.

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