

Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini, Commissioners Johannes Hahn and Dimitris Avramopoulos on the shipwreck off the coast of Libya

We are deeply saddened by the tragic news of a shipwreck off the coast of Al Khoms where over 100 persons may have lost their lives. This is a terrible reminder of the risks still faced by those making this dangerous journey to Europe. Every life lost is one too many. Our aim has always been to prevent lives being lost at sea and we will continue our work to prevent these perilous journeys taking place in the first place.

Our EU Delegation is in contact with the Libyan authorities, UN agencies and the NGOs to make sure that those rescued and disembarked receive protection and direct emergency assistance.

Ensuring adequate search and rescue capacity, providing safe and dignified alternatives to dangerous sea-crossings to EU in the form of resettlements and voluntary returns out of Libya are essential to prevent further losses of lives and must be accelerated. At the same time, predictable and sustainable solutions for search and rescue are urgently needed in the Mediterranean.

Libya's current system of managing irregular migration and arbitrarily detaining refugees and migrants has to end and needs to be brought into full compliance with international standards. The European Union stands ready to support the Libyan authorities in developing solutions to create safe and dignified alternatives to detention in full compliance with the international humanitarian standards and in respect of human rights.

We remain strongly committed to fighting traffickers and smugglers and to strengthening the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard to save lives at sea, ensuring full compliance with international standards. Our continuous financial support and our political advocacy towards the Libyan authorities allows UNHCR and IOM to be present at disembarkation points and most of the official detention centres. Equally, there is an urgent need to put in place mechanisms for improving the treatment of those rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard, notably by allowing the UN agencies to carry out screening and registration and to provide direct emergency assistance and protection.

We will continue to work with IOM and UNHCR in the context of the AU-EU-UN Taskforce to support and protect migrants and refugees in Libya. We expect parties to accelerate humanitarian evacuation and resettlement from Libya to third countries. In particular, we are supporting UNHCR's work to resettle the most vulnerable refugees with durable solutions outside Libya; around 4,400 refugees having been evacuated so far. We are also working closely with

the IOM and the African Union and its Member States to continue the Voluntary Humanitarian Returns, thereby adding to the more than 45,000 migrants returned to their countries of origin so far.