

Tuesday, 13 October 2020

**Speaking notes for
Mr. Francesco Testa (Italy)
Chair of the Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants**

Agenda item 2 (c): *Smuggling of Migrants Protocol*

Mr. President,

Excellencies, distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to brief the Conference on the work of the Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants since the ninth session of the Conference in 2018.

Over the past two years, the Working Group has met on two occasions, from 11 to 13 September 2019 and from 8 to 9 September 2020. The second and most recent meeting was held, as you are aware, under very particular circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its related health and safety concerns. For the first time in its history, the meeting of the Working Group was in fact held in a hybrid/in-person format, with a large number of experts connected remotely. This type of format allowed for an exceptionally broad and active

participation, with the total number of registered participants nearing 500, including from multiple experts representing LDCs and countries in transition from conflict situations. Further, a significant number of written and online submissions were received by the Secretariat during the meeting, supplementing oral discussions.

As contained in its reports, which were transmitted to the Conference, the Working Group considered the following topics at its last two meetings: (i) information-sharing on the smuggling of migrants as a form of transnational organized crime, consistent with article 10 of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, and article 28 of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; (ii) smuggling of migrants by air and its facilitation through document fraud; (iii) impact of natural disasters, conflicts and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on trends in organized criminal groups and on routes for the smuggling of migrants, as well as good practices to support effective law enforcement cooperation during such crises to detect, investigate and prosecute such cases; and (iv) successful strategies concerning the use of technology, including information and communications technology, to prevent and investigate the smuggling of migrants and to mount a robust response to the increasing use of cyberspace by criminal groups.

In 2019, the Working Group adopted **1 general recommendation, 10 recommendations on information-sharing on the smuggling of migrants and 13 recommendations on the smuggling of migrants by air and its facilitation through document fraud.** In 2020, the Working Group adopted **7 recommendations on the impact of natural disasters, conflicts and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on the smuggling of migrants and 15 on successful strategies concerning the use of technology to counter the smuggling of migrants.**

At the meeting of the Working Group in 2019, delegates shared their experiences on investigating and prosecuting migrant smuggling, including ways to strengthen information-sharing and other forms of cooperation. In addition, States highlighted the intrinsic connection between the smuggling of migrants by air and document fraud, including on the complex methods used by smugglers to avoid detection by border officials, through fraudulent passports and visas, organized visa fraud and the abuse of online visa systems.

At the meeting of the Working Group in 2020, delegates discussed challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and generally during crisis situations, in detecting, investigating and prosecuting the smuggling of migrants, and highlighted responses taken to address the possible short-term and long-term impacts of such crises on migrants and migration movements. In

addition, practitioners shared experiences on challenges deriving from the emergence of modern technologies and their application to the smuggling of migrants, while highlighting ways in which technology can be harnessed to effectively investigate and prosecute this crime.

Allow me to thank all delegates who took part in the discussions and the Secretariat for its work. It was a pleasure to Chair the Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive and successful session.
