

## **Speech by Tobias Billström, Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, at conference on resettlement in Sigtuna, 25-28 of August 2009**

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe for organizing this Conference on "Shaping the future for a stronger EU role in global refugee protection" - "Towards the common EU Resettlement Scheme". I also would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to participate in today's discussion.

The role of EU in global refugee protection is one of the most important issues to be discussed in the field of asylum in the near future and the process of establishing an EU resettlement programme has started and will be prioritized during the Swedish Presidency of the EU.

The challenge is not only to create an EU resettlement programme that can receive political support among the EU member states, but to create a resettlement programme that actually contributes to the global refugee protection mechanism and that makes difference for the individuals concerned. No one knows the situation for the individuals concerned better than the people and organizations working with these issues on the ground. It is therefore of crucial importance that NGO:s and other stakeholders, such as the UNHCR, share their points of view and their experiences from the field with us.

In this context I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe for their valuable contribution "Twelve Arguments and Seven proposals for the EU resettlement scheme".

As they pointed out in their document, the overwhelming majority of the refugees in the world find themselves in places far away from the EU. They are to be found in countries neighboring, or in the same region, as their country of origin. Host countries are also often developing ones, with limited resources. Most of them will never get a chance to leave these places and start a new life elsewhere, although many of them are among the most vulnerable ones.

Solidarity is a key word in the work of CCME and other NGO:s committed to these issues. Solidarity is also a key word in the process of formulating the future EU asylum policy. We are currently, in the EU, discussing how we can strengthen both the internal solidarity - in the form of a pilot project to relocate refugees from Malta to other EU Member States - and the external solidarity. The latter would be carried out through increased resettlement of refugees from third countries to the EU.

In this regard it is important to stress the importance to make a distinction between the concept of relocation, which is meant to be an internal burden-sharing instrument to be used between EU Member States, and the concept of resettlement which is the traditional instrument used to resettle people in need of protection from third countries outside EU to an EU Member State, or, for that matter, to another country where they can get protection. The resettlement tool should be used to offer protection and provide solutions for people who cannot receive adequate protection in the place where they are, and to show solidarity with other countries with substantial refugee populations.

I welcome the growing willingness among Member States to show solidarity within the EU, and the Malta pilot project is one way of doing this. However, this must not be carried out at the expense of help to third countries with difficult refugee situations. If we want to sustain the international protection regime - and I strongly believe it is in our own interest to do so - increased solidarity with the countries and regions where the majority of these individuals are, is necessary. It is my firm belief that the best instrument to achieve this objective is an efficient and appropriate EU resettlement programme.

A common resettlement programme could also be a way of facilitating legal access to the EU for persons with legitimate needs for protection, particularly in the context of an increasing emphasis external border control as well as a tight visa regime.

Currently, only ten EU Member States participate annually in resettlement. However, the global resettlement needs are much greater than the resettlement quotas that are available to the UNHCR. The numbers of refugees resettled in the EU are relatively low compared to the numbers taken in by many other countries in the industrialized world.

Sweden has accepted persons for organized resettlement since 1950 - in total tens of thousands of refugees. The size of our resettlement quota has varied over time. At present it amounts to 1 900 refugees per year. Our resettlement quota is seen as a means to take our share of the responsibility for refugees globally and to show solidarity with vulnerable people and countries. It is a natural complement to our domestic asylum system.

1900 refugees per year is not much compared to the millions of people that are in need of protection worldwide, but this is where an EU resettlement programme could make a difference. If all EU Member States could contribute to a common resettlement quota, we could increase the volumes, which are necessary in order for the quota to have a strategic impact.

A strategic use of the resettlement instrument could contribute to solve protracted refugee situations and prevent others from becoming permanent. The aim should be more than offering protection and a durable solution to a number of individual refugees. Strategically used, pooled resettlement quotas could encourage countries of origin to accept the return of their citizens and host countries to accept local integration, or at least self-reliance. At best it could solve entire refugee situations since refugee camps could be emptied and closed. In the long run it could also have a positive impact on secondary movements.

However, to be worthwhile, the establishment of an EU resettlement programme would have to result in a substantial increase of the resettlement quota offered today by the EU Member States that already practice resettlement .

Apart from the significant step of enabling the use of funds from the European Refugee Fund for resettlement, as well as the incorporation of resettlement in pilot regional protection programmes, further details of a common EU resettlement programme must be discussed, such as the cooperation with the UNHCR and third countries, ways of managing capacity building and transfer of knowledge from countries that already have resettlement programmes to those who are seeking to establish such programmes.

I am sure that the European Commission has already given this issue a lot of thought, and I think we all look forward to the proposal that is to be presented in the near future.

I look forward to the discussion, thank you for your attention.