



## Opening Remarks by Hon. Carmelo Abela, Minister for Home Affairs & National Security of The Republic Of Malta

High Representative/Vice President Mogherini,

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. It is an honour for me to address the Senior Officials of the Valletta partners on the occasion of this meeting, that has been convened to follow up on the Joint Action Plan agreed by our Heads of State or Government here in Malta in November 2015.

The Valletta Summit on Migration is indeed a landmark in relations on migration between the European Union and African States. The Valletta process remains the foundation of our approach to migration in Africa and will hopefully be given a fresh impetus during this two-day meeting.

The core objective of this meeting will be to take stock of the progress made in the implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan. However, it will also serve as an opportunity to achieve political direction on the way forward and the future priorities, so that we can continue to implement that Joint Action Plan in line with the principles and the vision agreed at the Valletta Summit.

I take this opportunity to thank the Chairs and all those involved the Rabat and Khartoum Processes for their painstaking work over the past months and for their efforts to provide us with a picture of public policies and programmes undertaken per domain so far.

I would also like to thank all parties involved in the implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan - much progress has been made since the Valletta Summit and I am convinced that we will continue to work steadily together to enhance our cooperation on migration matters.

As the Declaration on the external aspects of migration, agreed upon in Malta last Friday by the members of the European Council, points out, the Valletta Action Plan has, together with the Partnership Framework, allowed the EU to deepen long-term cooperation with partner countries through a solid partnership based on mutual trust. Our work is already yielding results, and will be intensified.

Within a European Union context, Malta has consistently argued for the intensification of cooperation between our two continents. This remains a priority for Malta, be it as an EU Member State or as the current Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Our cooperation on migration should be as comprehensive as possible, encompassing and giving equal importance to all five priority domains agreed upon in the Joint Valletta Action Plan.



Here in Malta, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for Home Affairs, which are responsible for the external and internal dimensions of migration respectively, are fully committed to see the engagement between European and African partners continue on the basis of the Valletta principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility.

We need to continue addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; to enhance cooperation on legal migration and mobility; to reinforce the protection of migrants and asylum seekers; to prevent and fight irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and to work more closely to improve cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration.

Of course, cooperation in the migration sphere should, and indeed can, be beneficial both from a European as well as an African perspective.

Unfortunately, we continue facing an irregular migration scenario that is leading to the loss of thousands of lives at sea, further to being unsustainable. Tragically, the number of deaths of children, women and men crossing the Mediterranean hit a record high in 2016, and this calls for immediate action.

It is regrettable that migration between Africa and Europe is, to a significant extent, still being arranged by migrant smuggling networks whose only interest lies in quick and exorbitant profits. Further to people perishing at sea, thousands of migrants are being exploited after being lured from their countries and regions of origin, often on the basis of false promises and misinformation.

Italian and Maltese assets, among those of other countries, have over the past years prevented several tragedies at sea. However, it is a fact that as long as migrant smugglers are allowed to operate, lives will continue being lost. We need to be more decisive in the fight against such networks - and by 'we' I do mean all of us, on both the African and European sides.

At the same time, we cannot stress enough the value of addressing the root causes of migration, by fostering development in the several regions of origin. This should contribute towards discouraging irregular migration.

However, it has to be recognised that such initiatives will not stop migration altogether. Indeed, our objective should rather be to manage the migratory process in such a way to bring about benefits to both countries of origin and destination. This is certainly not easy to achieve; our partnership was established precisely with a view to achieving such and similar objectives.

You, the Senior Officials of the Valletta Partners, have a very important role to play in the development of cooperation that would lead to the achievement of these objectives. You are our administration, managing the day-to-day running of ministries, departments and entities that have a crucial role to play in the implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan.

You also have an important role to play in the international protection sphere, as we need to make sure that international protection processes are supported by the provision of adequate resources in as many countries as possible.



We need to prevent situations where asylum seekers have to place themselves at the mercy of migrant smugglers in order to cross large tracts of land or the Mediterranean. International Protection is one of those spheres that call for more intensive and ongoing cooperation between European and African partners.

At the same time, we need to strive for more resettlement opportunities, as well as the allocation of funding for the establishment and strengthening of international protection procedures, evidently in cooperation with UNHCR.

Whilst the commitments in question must be undertaken at the political level, cooperation at the administrative level remains a prerequisite. Indeed, that is the reason why meetings such as today's are important and meaningful.

Clearly this does not only apply to the areas of operation I focused upon, but also to others such as legal migration. It should be clear that the provision of legal migration opportunities is as important as the measures I mentioned, for our global objective can only be reached if we manage to secure progress in all the relevant policy areas.

Cooperation between the European and the African partners must be as comprehensive in practice - on the ground - as it is in the framework provided by the Action Plan.

If we are really committed towards our objective we - the European and African Governments - must continue to work on all the aspects of the Action Plan. This is probably the most important message.

We need to maintain the momentum, to make further, sustainable progress. This is a long term process which requires unwavering commitment from both sides.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will leave you with these thoughts, whilst wishing you a very fruitful meeting. Your success is our success, and is central to the success of the Valletta initiative.

Thank you.