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**UNHCR statement regarding the sea arrival of Syrian refugees on February 3, 2017**

Monday 6 February, 2017

UNHCR would like to express its appreciation to the Republic of Cyprus for the swift rescue-at-sea of 93 Syrian refugees off the coast of Pyrgos on Friday night. About half of the refugees are children, some alone without their parents. The authorities took the necessary measures to ensure their reception and address their immediate needs.

At a time when thousands of people lose their lives in the Mediterranean Sea in their desperation to find safety in Europe, the Cypriot authorities should be commended for their efficient and professional response in saving lives in distress at sea. No deaths or missing persons have been reported during the 12 boat arrivals of refugees in Cyprus over the last two years.

Although Cyprus has received an increased number of Syrian refugees since the onset of the Syrian conflict, this is a manageable situation when seen in light of the magnitude of the conflict and destruction that has forced almost 5 million Syrian refugees to flee their homes and seek protection in other countries, mostly in the neighbouring countries. UNHCR stands ready to support the Republic of Cyprus to develop contingency and preparedness plans to better respond to situations of pressure from possible increased arrivals of refugees and asylum-seekers.

“In an era where refugees need our support more than ever, it is important that all democratic States, including Cyprus, continue to provide protection to people who are forced to flee war and persecution in a spirit of solidarity and collaboration,” said Damtew Dessalegne, the UNHCR Representative for Cyprus. Until ongoing conflicts are resolved, countries in the EU and beyond need to be prepared to receive refugees and support them to integrate into their societies.

It is important for the EU as a whole to learn from the operational problems witnessed in 2015-16. It is in this context that in December 2016, UNHCR launched a comprehensive proposal for “Better Protecting Refugees in the EU and Globally”. The UNHCR proposals call for a well-organised, common and predictable response to new refugee arrivals in the EU. The proposals also include an effective solidarity mechanism, which means fairness for States and asylum-seekers, through the equitable distribution of cases during times of pressure.

The paper "Better Protecting Refugees in the EU and Globally" can be found at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58385d4e4.html> in English and at

[http://www.unhcr.org.cy/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Images/Better\\_Protecting\\_Refugees\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_and\\_Globally\\_GR\\_F.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org.cy/fileadmin/user_upload/Images/Better_Protecting_Refugees_in_the_EU_and_Globally_GR_F.pdf) in Greek.