

Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake on the child migrant and refugee crisis in Europe

Photos and broll are available at: <http://uni.cf/1LOQt9b>

NEW YORK, 3 September 2015 – “Heart-breaking images of children’s bodies washing up on the shores of Europe ... lying suffocated in the backs of trucks crossing borders ... being passed over barbed wire fences by desperate parents.

“As the migrant and refugee crisis in Europe deepens, these will not be the last shocking images to ricochet around the world on social media, on our televisions screens and on the front pages of our newspapers.

“But it is not enough for the world to be shocked by these images. Shock must be matched by action.

“For the plight of these children is neither by their choice nor within their control. They need protection. They have a right to protection.

“We urge that the following measures be taken:

1. Protect these children through the provision of essential services at all times – including health care, food, emotional support, and education – and adequate shelter for migrants and refugees that keeps families together.
2. Deploy adequate numbers of trained child welfare experts to support children and their families.
3. Continue search and rescue operations – not only at sea, but also on land, as families move across countries – and make every effort to prevent the abuse and exploitation of migrant and refugee children.
4. Put the best interests of children first in all decisions made regarding these children – including in asylum cases.

“Our hearts go out today to the families who have lost children – off the coasts, on the shores, and along the roadsides of Europe. As the debates on policies proceed, we must never lose sight of the deeply human nature of this crisis.

“Nor of the children.

“Nor of its scale. At least a quarter of those seeking refuge in Europe are children – in the first six months of this year, more than 106,000 children claimed asylum in Europe.

“And we should never forget what lies behind so many of the stories of families seeking sanctuary in Europe: terrible conflicts such as that in Syria, which already has forced some 2 million children to flee their country. Only an end to these conflicts can bring an end to the misery of so many.”