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**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Girma Asmerom
Permanent Representative of Eritrea
to the United Nations
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Mr. Chairman
Distinguished delegates,

First of all, I wish to express on behalf of my government and delegation the deepest appreciation to you Mr. Chairman, and the Director of IOM, H.E. William Swing, as well as his staff for the warm welcome extended to my delegation. I wish also to thank members of the IOM for approving Eritrea's request for membership to this important organization.

Eritrea is pleased to join the IOM family, a body that is playing a significant and relevant role on the issue of global migration and human mobility.

Eritrea strongly feels migration is a global challenge that needs common responsibility, approach, close cooperation and solidarity among countries of origin, transit and destination.

I want to assure you, Mr. Chairman that Eritrea takes its membership to IOM seriously and is ready to fulfill all of its obligations.

Mr. Chairman,

Eritrea, as a country of origin, welcomes the timely and important Valletta Summit, which brought together the African and European states and their respective regional bodies to map out and adopt an action plan that aims to address the challenges of irregular migration at the national and regional level within the migration and development nexus.

Over the past few years, my country, Eritrea, has faced a serious challenge of illegal migration, human trafficking and the willful exploitation of the suffering of its youth for a sinister strategic agenda and political purposes. A distorted and bleak picture of Eritrea was and is deliberately

recycled which is in total variance with the reality. Whatever the motivation, several destination countries have pursued and pursuing their misguided policies that encourage irregular migration from Eritrea. This misguided policy is not only harming Eritrea and victimizing its youth, it is also affecting the region, countries of destination and transit.

Mr. Chairman,

The misguided policy against Eritrea also lacks context. Eritrea, with 50% Muslims and 50% Christian population, located in the strategic Red Sea maritime route and the volatile Horn of Africa region with 1200 kilometers of coastline and more than 350 islands, continues to enjoy peace, stability, security and social harmony. It has also successfully kept at bay radicalism, extremism and terrorism. These achievements are no small order, considering the dynamics in the volatile Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region as well as the concerted hostilities and all types of pressure Eritrea is facing. Currently, Eritrea's sovereign territory, including the town of Badme is occupied by Ethiopia, and Ethiopian high-level government officials have several times publicly declared to use force against Eritrea. Furthermore, Eritrea as a country located in the volatile Horn of Africa and the Red Sea Region has the right to be vigilant and properly equipped to fight global terrorism and extremism.

Mr. Chairman,

Therefore, denying these realities and context and deliberately distorting and misrepresenting the national service as an "indefinite" act and portraying Eritrea as the second largest source of migrants, to Europe, next to Syria, in the world, is not only factually wrong but disingenuous. This distorted narrations and inflated figures reflected by certain governments and organizations are clearly meant to demonize the Eritrean government and to use Eritrean illegal migrants as a poster child so that funds can be requested on their behalf.

Mr. Chairman,

Eritrea's national service program which is a legal obligation that is limited to 18 months is deliberately misinterpreted and misrepresented as "indefinite service". It must be corrected and rejected. When there is a threat to sovereignty and security, it is natural and correct for every government and country to mobilize and deploy its natural and human resources. Its Sovereign Territory Occupied and located in the volatile regions of the Red Sea with proximity to Yemen, Eritrea's deployment and mobilization of its able bodied men and women, therefore, is not only correct but an internationally accepted legitimate act.

However, as a result of the deliberate misrepresentation of Eritrea's reality, today Eritrea's national service legal and noble program has become a bankable narration for all types of asylum seekers and illegal migrants. Once Eritreans reach the shores of Europe and America, they are given preferential treatment and accorded automatic asylum status. Legal concepts such as **Non-refoulement** and **Prima Facie** are loosely used as a sound-bite when dealing with Eritrea illegal immigrants. As a result, several African illegal immigrants are advised and coached by human traffickers to claim to be Eritreans.

Confirming these facts, a few weeks ago the Ambassador of Austria in Ethiopia, Mr. Andreas Milan, in an **interview** with a Austrian media outlet, APA, stated that "**thousands of Ethiopians**, continuing to migrate illegally to Saudi Arabia and South Africa, and those who flee

to Europe claim that they are from Eritrea. We believe that **among the thousands of Eritrean migrants in Europe, 30 – 40% are Ethiopians**”.

Furthermore, the EU Border Control Agency **FRONTEX**, in its first quarterly 2015 report in paragraph 23, states “before arriving in Libya Ethiopians are often advised by human smugglers to claim Eritrean nationality. This will indicate that the number of Eritreans arriving in Italy is probably inflated to this very prevalent nationality swapping.”

This fact is being properly appraised and understood by several European delegations who have visited and are visiting Eritrea. For example, Eritrea’s policy of no reprisals for any Eritrean that left the country illegally and returns home to stay or visit has been verified by the Danish and UK governments and they have consequently revised their asylum policy towards Eritreans.

While revisions of asylum procedures are important steps, Eritrean government strongly feels that dealing with the root cause of illegal migrants and human trafficking is important. As a result, the President of Eritrea has formally requested the UN Secretary General and members of the Security Council to create a body that will investigate crimes perpetuated by human traffickers and smugglers against its nationals and other peoples. The President has also expressed Eritrea’s readiness to fully cooperate with the body and provide it with all relevant information in its possession. The Eritrean government also feels that creating educational and employment opportunities for the youth in the country of origin is the appropriate action and solution. In line with this agenda and principle, Eritrea has made slow but steady progress in health and education sectors and achieved most of the Millennium Development Goals. Thanks to sustained investment on human resources development, agriculture and infrastructure, the lean years of sluggish expansion are giving way to a new phase of sustained economic growth, which promises tangible improvement in people’s lives.

Mr. Chairman,

Eritrea is confident that developments, combined with a raft of measures that the government is taking in the economic, social and political domains that are focused on providing education, training, skills and opportunities for its youth, will not only enable it to overcome the challenge of irregular migration and human trafficking but to build a solid basis for a just and prosperous society.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I once again wish to reaffirm Eritrea’s commitment to the IOM principles and objectives.

I thank you Mr. Chairman