

**ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER
FOR JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS TONIO BORG AT THE CIMO
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE, NICE**

11TH MAY, 2006

Our meeting today and tomorrow enables us to focus on some of the most pressing issues facing the world today: the fight against terrorism, the fight against organised crime and the fight against illegal immigration. Our region of the world is especially affected by these matters.

Uncertainty and instability brought about by fragile economies, inequitable distribution of wealth and resources, religious extremism, human rights violations, political repression and violent conflicts are the seed-bed for the organised crime, acts of terrorism and illegal immigration that are having such a de-stabilising effect on societies throughout our region.

The draft declaration which has been circulated alludes to all these issues and makes a number of sensible proposals at tackling them.

However, I should like to spend five minutes highlighting the issue of the fight against illegal immigration. For Malta – one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world – lying at the cross-roads of this volatile Sea between North Africa and southern Europe – illegal immigration poses challenges of the most serious magnitude.

Let me acknowledge at once that these are issues which many of you also are having to grapple with. But we are in the front line and the unparalleled density of Malta's population, its small size and geographic isolation render our position all the more precarious. The draft Memorandum identifies these concerns. But I would wish to see a greater determination and emphasis on finding and implementing practical solutions to the problems. It is all very well our knowing what the problems are. It is quite another to deliver solutions. It is incumbent on us to try to do so. May I highlight three such areas.

First, the return, re-admission and re-integration of illegal immigrants to their countries of origin. We need actively to adopt the actions that

strengthen cooperation and action between countries of origin and destination countries to identify common solutions.

Comprehensive, practical assisted voluntary return and re-integration programmes between destination countries and the countries of origin need to be established. In this connection we must seek to develop more effective joint mechanisms for repatriation by air.

Secondly, the vital business of making improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of border management, in both the countries of origin and of transit. The new sailing season is upon us. The influx of fresh waves of illegal immigrants will start shortly. Actions here must include:

Close maritime and air operational cooperation with transit countries to prevent irregular immigration. The feasibility of organising a network of Mediterranean patrols, with an integral coordinated control and surveillance of maritime borders, must be examined expeditiously and implemented.

The provision of specialist training and equipment and the regular exchange of operational information with transit countries and countries of origin must be developed.

Allied with this, thirdly, there must be the strenuous elimination of human smuggling and trafficking.

We must find ways of closer police cooperation between destination countries, transit countries and countries of origin, to eradicate these inhumane operations.

Permanent contacts and liaison need to be established between police forces on organised crime and illegal immigration, including people smuggling and human trafficking. Where such contacts have already been established, they should be broadened and deepened.

We have talked before in this forum about the adoption of an integrated and holistic approach to the problems posed by illegal immigration. Malta and Libya presented a joint paper on this subject to Foreign Ministers in the 5 + 5 Forum over a year ago.

The problems that face us are difficult. But they are not intractable, provided we can exercise the international political will to deal with them. We must now seek detailed action on the ground in a more determined manner.