

Agenda Item 2 (a)

Presentation to UNHCR Standing Committee

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Note on International Protection

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Distinguished Delegates, Madame Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's Note on International Protection reflects upon human mobility which presents both challenges and opportunities for states, host societies and concerned individuals. The Note highlights that the increased human mobility of the modern era is a reality and is likely to grow further in its complexity given multiple factors such as climate change overlapping with conflict to give one example. Responding to displacement remains a significant challenge particularly where isolated approaches are adopted. Forced displacement is characterized by complex underlying factors efforts to respond or to address such movements invariably require a holistic collaborative approach.

The Note canvasses, therefore, ways in which states and host societies can, and in many cases do, work together to effectively manage human mobility. Such cooperation is essential to address the humanitarian and protection dimensions of displacement, to maximise opportunities and to advance solutions across the board which can be effectively transitioned in to address both root causes and longer term sustainability needs.

2016 was an important year in advancing a collaborative, international coalition to address the spectrum of needs identified in the context of refugee movements. The New York Declaration as adopted by states on the 19th of September acknowledged the need to tackle more effectively the underlying root causes and drivers of displacement, as well as to advance as early on as possible collaborative solutions which avoid protracted displacement scenarios. For example, education is critical to ensuring future opportunities for the refugee child, but if education is not introduced as an option for months or years, or is provided by humanitarian actors on an ad hoc basis rather than being rooted in national systems, how can we ensure that refugee children can emerge from their displacement with new tools with which to rebuild and reconstruct their lives, their society, and their future? We are all dependent therefore on effective and timely education as a platform toward sustainable peace, reconciliation and reconstruction, and yet too often education is an afterthought, with fewer than 1% of refugee children actually graduating with certification at the tertiary learning level.

Likewise labour mobility and skills enhancement opportunities, in which refugees can contribute to their host communities and can play a role in development interventions, these too often figure into our discussions too late in the displacement cycle. Strain on local systems continues where humanitarian responses run parallel to national structures without a plan for longer term engagement. The New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework provide us with the framework, the opportunity, and the collective commitment to overcome many of these challenges. While this year's Note on International Protection by necessity provides an overview of the state of protection globally today, it is also seeking to focus the lens on the potential for greater solidarity with refugees and host

communities alike to respond to crises, ensure humanitarian life-saving interventions early on, and move toward a solutions focused collaborative strategy to unlock the potential refugees, IDPs, stateless and asylum-seekers represent.

To do this, action is required on a number of fronts as indeed the Note reports. It requires redoubled efforts to prevent and resolve statelessness, as both a root cause and a consequence of displacement. It requires greater efforts to end the cycle of violence which causes people to flee internally within their own countries, as well as across international borders.

This year's note reflects the importance of access to protection, as a central part of state responses to displacement. Protection-sensitive entry systems can ensure that States manage their borders effectively, while permitting access to territory. Beyond this, the operation of effective status determination systems which can identify refugees swiftly are also in the interests of all concerned and innovative strategies can create new potential to ensure those in need are swiftly identified, ensured access and protection, and linked to some of the constructive approaches outlined above such as education.

The note underlines that protection responses must take into account the specific needs of asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons, among others. This includes prioritising protection for children and youth, preventing and responding to SGBV in all its forms, and promoting gender equality in different regions worldwide.

UNHCR takes a community-based approach to achieve positive protection outcomes for individuals, and ensure accountability to the people it serves. This approach focuses on participation and community engagement. It leverages the experiences, skills and capacities of our persons of concern, and promotes the role of displaced persons as active agents in their own protection.

Self-reliance has never been more crucial for refugees, which enables them to live lawfully, peacefully and productively alongside host communities. As noted for many refugees, the first step towards self-reliance is gaining access to education, with participation in higher education further developing their leadership skills and employability, particularly important for youth. When refugees are included in national education systems, not only do they have access to accredited programmes, but host community children can also benefit from the investment into existing systems that international assistance brings to this sector.

With new crises proliferating while others remain unresolved, we need to strengthen our efforts to find solutions which ensure national protection for all rights. The Note accordingly highlights the importance of seeking solutions from the beginning of a crisis.

Among the measures which can facilitate such solutions, we recall the importance of travel documents for refugees and stateless persons (which is addressed in detail in a separate Conference Room Paper before this Standing Committee). Recent changes to the applicable international standards mean that refugees need access to machine-readable travel documents. This can facilitate their access to solutions through complementary pathways, as well as reducing the risk of fraud and document misuse. Many states have already taken important steps to meet the new standards, and we hope others will continue to do so in the immediate future.

Resettlement continues to serve as an important protection tool for the most vulnerable refugees. It is also a tangible way to demonstrate solidarity with countries hosting large numbers of refugees. In 2016, global resettlement reached a 20-year high, with the engagement of a broader and more diverse group of States. However, since the beginning of this year, the available resettlement places globally have dropped. UNHCR will continue to advocate for the alignment of resettlement places with the commitments outlined in the New York Declaration, along with the establishment and expansion of complementary pathways to protection and solutions for refugees in collaboration with States and other partners.

With respect to statelessness, there has been progress towards achieving the goals of the I Belong Campaign. States have acceded to the conventions, and have reformed their laws to prevent and reduce statelessness. Over 100,000 stateless persons obtained solutions over the past year. This has been achieved through strong partnerships and the positive engagement of States. As the Campaign approaches its mid-point, we look forward to a high level event in 2019, providing momentum towards achieving the ambitious objective of ending statelessness by 2024.

Having acknowledged the pressing need to respond more effectively to large movements of refugees and migrants, the United Nations and its Member States need to translate the commitments of the New York Declaration into action. Far-sighted leadership and collaborative, comprehensive approaches are needed to overcome the challenges, and to seize the opportunities which are associated with human mobility today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the challenges are unprecedented, indeed. The number of people in need of protection, the complexity of their circumstances, the extent of their suffering when protection is not accorded or reachable These are all on an unprecedented scale. Fortunately, the opportunity for collaboration which addresses these challenges is also unprecedented, and UNHCR is heartened by the commitment taken forward by states in the context of the New York Declaration. The Note seeks to speak to the challenges and the opportunities before us. We look forward to addressing these together with you toward a greater delivery of international protection and solutions for those in need.

Thank you.

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