

**Statement by His Excellency Lt Gen (R) Abdul Quadir Baloch,
Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Pakistan
67th Meeting of the
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
(3 October 2016)**

**Mr. Chairman,
High Commissioner for Refugees,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

At the outset, allow me to formally congratulate Excellency Filippo Grandi, on assuming the very important responsibilities of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It is indeed at a very crucial juncture when the world is witnessing some of the largest scale human displacements of our times.

High Commissioner,

Let me assure you of Pakistan's full support in your endeavours to manage and seek durable solutions to unprecedented human miseries related to forced displacements. May I also express my gratitude for your successful visit to Pakistan in June this year.

We agree with the High Commissioner's analysis of present state of displacement, and the need for a strategic shift to guide his five years in office. In this regard, I would like to add the following:

One, the growing refugee related xenophobia in developed societies is a cause of great concern. Efforts need to be made at the social, political and economic levels to curb these tendencies and to educate host communities of the benefits of diversity;

Two, the alternative approaches must not undermine the primacy of durable solutions, especially voluntary repatriation.

Three, solutions-oriented approaches from the outset of displacement situations must also be developed for addressing protracted situations.

Four, the two year follow-up in arriving at the Global Compact for Refugees must be transparent, inclusive, and not seek to place additional burdens on the refugee-hosting countries.

Five, equal emphasis needs to be placed in addressing the root causes of forced displacement.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan has been generously hosting millions of Afghan refugees for nearly four decades. We continue to host the world's largest protracted refugee population of over 1.4 million registered Afghans, in addition to almost the same number of undocumented Afghans. This has presented Pakistan and its people with a range of interrelated challenges, including security and socioeconomic pressures on the overstretched public service delivery systems. We have also learned a great deal from this long experience, marked by globally significant milestones. These include the largest ever nationwide registration of refugees with biometric technologies; the first ever use of the IRIS recognition system; and the facilitation of the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR's history.

Provision of protection and assistance to refugees is only one element of the responsibilities of the international community. In the absence of solutions, displaced persons are left in a state of limbo, abandonment and desperation. In this vein, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) was adopted by the international community in May 2012. It provides a unique integrated framework for joint interventions of humanitarian and development actors aimed at facilitating voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, while providing continued assistance to host communities through the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Pakistan remains committed to voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees in safety and dignity, within the framework of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees.

Pakistan has extended the stay of Afghans in Pakistan till 31st March 2017, and has signed the Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation with validity till 31st December 2016. As of end of last month, more than 190,000 registered Afghans and another 160,000 undocumented Afghans have voluntarily repatriated from Pakistan to Afghanistan in safety and dignity. These are expected to increase gradually in coming months as more and more Afghans strive to voluntarily return and take active part in the reconstruction of their homeland.

The ownership and commitment of the Afghan Government of National Unity in making voluntary repatriation and reintegration of its citizens one of its highest national priorities, presents a unique opportunity to bring this protracted situation to an end. We greatly appreciate the increase in repatriation grant to US \$ 400 per returnee. We appeal to the donors for their continued support for the enhanced return and reintegration package.

While significant progress has been made, a lot remains to be done.

Mr. Chairman,

We call for reinvigorated engagement of the international community in supporting the ‘Afghan-led and Afghan-owned’ peace process and complementing Afghanistan’s efforts to create conditions conducive to sustainable return and reintegration through robust development support by all concerned actors. In this regard, full support to the ‘Afghan National Peace and Development Framework’, being presented at Brussels, will be critical for Afghanistan’s nation-building and reconstruction efforts.

In line with our tradition of hospitality, we will continue providing assistance to the remaining Afghan refugees in our country until their return to their homeland.

The priority focus will remain on continuing to empower Afghan refugees, in particular children and youth, to build their human capital and further support their sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan. To this end, and in line with the long-established policy and practice, the Government of Pakistan will continue providing unhindered access to education of Afghan children including in Pakistani schools, free healthcare in all major public hospitals and as a policy, allowing them to employ themselves in services, industrial, agricultural, labour and transport sectors. In continuing to do so, Pakistan will appreciate continued and enhanced support of the international community.

Enhanced investment in displaced youth will also assist efforts to stabilize the populations, mitigate potential onwards movements, and avoid situations where disenfranchised and marginalized youth resorts to negative coping strategies and becomes exposed to radicalization and extremism.

The international community’s collective engagement and unwavering support in closing the world’s most protracted refugee chapter can serve as an inspiring achievement in this era of unprecedented displacement. In line with the

New York Declaration and the SSAR, Pakistan remains committed to be part of this global endeavour.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, my appreciation and acknowledgement goes to the United Nations, particularly UNHCR, the international community and other friends, who have rendered political, financial and moral support to Pakistan in dealing with the most protracted refugee situation of our times.

My special thanks go to the courageous staff of the UNHCR who risk their lives to save lives and help alleviate misery.

I thank you.