

67th session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR

General Debate - Statement by Portugal

Mr. Nuno Gabriel Cabral, Permanent Mission of Portugal in Geneva

Thank you very much Mr. President,

Let me begin by thanking the High Commissioner, Mr. Filippo Grandi, for his comprehensive initial statement during the opening session of this Executive Committee. As a framework for action in the coming year, it is an auspicious beginning and bears the hallmarks of continuity that builds upon the vast and valuable work undertaken by Mr. António Guterres, his predecessor as High Commissioner, as well as of the ambition to clear new pathways for fulfilling his mandate in the future.

I would also like to comment on one of the strategic points in your initial statement: that of a comprehensive review of IDP responses globally, in order to better understand what needs to change to make UNHCR engagement more coherent and predictable. Your laudable intention is even more so as it is clearly and directly linked to preventative approaches to the forced displacement phenomenon.

Also in the context of prevention, Mr. High Commissioner, the obstacles you have mentioned, such as the unevenness of engagement across operations, or UNHCR's budget structure and financial processes can lead to the de-prioritise IDP operations, are issues that require careful addressing. The hesitation you also mentioned is, however, of a political nature and it requires, from all states and donors, that we keep our ears closer to the ground. Portugal very much looks forward to the results of the announced review of IDP responses.

Mr. High Commissioner,

Regarding solidarity and burden sharing, Portugal is pleased to say that it has spared no efforts in seeking to do its share in these troubled times. In the midst of serious budgetary constraints, our Government, in close articulation with civil society stakeholders, has actively contributed to the increased challenges that the ongoing conflicts have presented to all European countries. We hereby reaffirm our intention to fulfil the commitments already assumed with our partners and, more so, with all those in need of international protection. Portugal calls upon all states to do the same.

In the framework of an EU common response to this crisis, my country has committed to relocate and resettle 4.486 persons. Hundreds of these persons,

formerly in Greece, Italy and Turkey have already come to Portugal. Furthermore, we have also expressed our willingness to admit an additional 5.800 persons as a sign of solidarity towards our European partners most challenged by the migratory influx.

Also, allow me to stress the need to protect and promote the human rights of all refugees and asylum seekers, including the right to education at all levels.

In this regard, a word on the noteworthy efforts undertaken by Portugal's former president, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, within the Global Platform for Syrian Refugees, through which several hundreds of Syrian refugees have found an opportunity to begin or continue their higher education in Portugal and in other partner countries. Initiatives such as these are proof that investment in providing higher education of refugees is possible and feasible, and that increased accessibility is a matter of political will.

You have mentioned, Mr. High Commissioner, the recurrent fact of insufficient funding for UNHCR operations in Africa. Major displacement situations such as Somalia, South Sudan and the Central African Republic are all resourced at less than 20%. This situation, and the disparity regarding other very serious situations, as you have correctly noted, is unacceptable. States and other stakeholders, have to attend to this situation with a renewed sense of solidarity, strategy and urgency.

Final words, Mr. High Commissioner, to address an issue which Portugal has already raised during the last Human Rights Council, which is that of the withdrawal of citizenship, in particular when it results in statelessness, as retaliation for political activity. Such measures run counter not only to the human right to a nationality but also to all efforts to combat statelessness. They are, however, part of today's political practice, legal frameworks and judicial enforcement in some countries, and are not unequivocally condemned internationally. Such situation must not be allowed to continue.

I thank you.