

UNHCR Executive Committee

68th Session

General Debate

Statement by Ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi
Permanent Representative of Austria to the UN Office in Geneva

Austria aligns itself with the Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

Mr. Chair,

I would like to thank High Commissioner Filippo Grandi for his opening statement and his skilful leadership of UNHCR. We equally thank all UNHCR's staff for their dedicated work in often difficult and dangerous operating environments.

With more than 65 million people displaced worldwide, we remain confronted with unprecedented humanitarian challenges. Protracted crisis situations in Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan and too many other countries and regions continue to cause massive displacement and large-scale refugee movements; in addition, and within a few weeks only we have just witnessed a staggering number of more than 400.000 Rohingyas who have sought safety from an outbreak of violence in Rakhine State and fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh. The Austrian government has swiftly provided financial support in order to support reception conditions in Bangladesh.

Over the past few years, Austria has significantly increased humanitarian financing; in addition to our core contribution, this year we have so far already provided or pledged to UNHCR more than seven million USD for its operations in Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Uganda and Somalia.

At the same time, domestically Austria has invested heavily to respond to the large-scale influx of refugees and migrants in 2015 and 2016, when more than 130.000 persons requested asylum in Austria. Also in 2017 Austria is still among those European States with the highest numbers of asylum applications per capita. Apart from providing accommodation and basic care for asylum seekers in need, my government has considerably increased expenses on measures for integration such as language and orientation courses.

In addition, Austria has participated in UNHCR's humanitarian admission and resettlement programs for Syrian refugees since 2013: By now almost 1.900 Syrian refugees have arrived in Austria and received refugee status. We have duly taken note of UNHCR's call for an additional 40.000 resettlement places for refugees located in

15 priority countries along the Central Mediterranean route and have participated in the first meeting of the respective core group on 11 September.

Resettlement and other legal pathways constitute one important instrument in the tool box to respond to large-scale movements of refugees; those who are really in need of protection from persecution should be granted asylum. While the international response to the drowning in the Mediterranean has been far too slow, we welcome that in 2017 irregular arrivals by sea to Europe and thus also fatalities during such attempts have finally decreased.

We thank the High Commissioner for organizing a special segment on the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF). We applaud those eleven countries that are already applying the CRRF and thank UNCHR for its skilful stewardship. One year after the adoption of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, the implementation of the CRRF remains at the core of a future Global Compact on Refugees. In our view, we must redouble our efforts in prevention and better tackle the root causes of displacement. A major root cause is the inconvenient truth that today's wars and conflicts are fought in cities and other urban areas. Explosive weapons used in such populated areas overwhelmingly kill and injure civilians rather than combatants. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, more than 90 per cent of the victims are civilians. We cannot accept that tens of thousands of civilians are killed every year because conflict parties do not comply with IHL. In addition, infrastructure damage to hospitals, schools or to electricity and water grids causes additional deaths and diseases; affected communities are often left with no other choice than fleeing their home cities and villages. Austria together with other states, UN OCHA, the ICRC and numerous NGOs strives to reduce the human suffering caused by explosive weapons in populated areas. Less suffering and destruction of vital infrastructure such as hospitals would significantly reduce displacement. We look forward to elaborate further on this during the future discussions on the Global Compact on Refugees.

Finally, let me assure you High Commissioner that Austria will continue to be a strong partner of UNHCR and continue to support your organisation in your precious work.

Thank you very much.