

**TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES  
AND  
UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES FILIPPO GRANDI  
PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA, 17 DECEMBER 2019**

**Secretary-General António Guterres:** Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It is a true pleasure to be back in Geneva. Having worked as High Commissioner for Refugees for 10 years, it is heartening to see the international community come together today in support of refugees and host communities. Global forced displacement has been rising steadily in recent years. When I started in 2005 as High Commissioner for Refugees, there were 38 million people displaced in the world and we were helping one million people go back home every year. And for many of our colleagues, there was a sensation that soon UNHCR would have no reason to exist anymore.

Unfortunately, things have changed quite dramatically. Global forced displacement has been rising steadily in recent years. Today, more than 70 million people are forcibly displaced -- double the level of 20 years ago, and 2.3 million more than just one year ago. Moreover, the growth in displacement is outpacing the rate at which solutions are being found. Conflicts have become more complex and interlinked. Combined with the megatrends of climate change, population growth, rapid urbanization, food insecurity and water scarcity, forced displacement and humanitarian needs will likely continue their troubling rise. Our system of international protection is one of the defining successes of the past century. But it is clearly feeling the strain. This is the moment to ensure that the human rights of refugees are upheld, to re-establish the integrity of the international refugee protection regime and to address the root causes that lead people to flee in the first place. At the same time, we must change the way we respond to refugee situations so that we can better cope with present realities and prepare for future challenges.

And the Global Compact on Refugees offers a path forward. I pay tribute to the generosity of the developing and middle-income countries that have been hosting millions and millions of refugees, sometimes with an enormous impact in their economies and their societies. And we need more international cooperation by all relevant partners, and a genuine commitment to sharing responsibilities among Member States. International solidarity is also necessary in order to allow refugees greater access to jobs, livelihoods and education in host countries. Pending a durable solution, this will not only promote refugee self-reliance but will also contribute to the host country's economy and help refugees to thrive alongside their host communities. And this was exactly the lines of the discussions and pledges made in this conference.

The pledges announced this morning by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank and by the private sector are welcome examples of the crucial role that these entities play in responding to refugee situations. Together with others, ongoing or planned investments, by the private sector and other bilateral development entities and other financial institutions, all these have ensured tangible results for refugees and host communities. We hope that with today's conference, these will quickly accelerate in the near future. I want to express my deep gratitude to the many partners that have

shown great solidarity with refugees and host communities and also to tell you how proud I am to have been a member of UNHCR for 10 years in the past, and how much I envy the new High Commissioner for Refugees.

**High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi:** Of course, as you know, he was not a member, he was the head of UNHCR for a very long time, and it was not easy to come after the now Secretary-General, but it is, it has been a challenging time, interesting times. You remember very well that a year ago exactly, I would say, the General Assembly adopted a Global Compact, in fact two Global Compacts. The one we were more involved in, as UNHCR, was the Compact on Refugees. The Compact actually foresees, has as one of its elements, that we need to convene one year after at ministerial level a Global Forum on Refugees, and this is what is happening this week.

I would certainly share the view of the Secretary-General that the context has become difficult. I always say that there are at least three big elements of difficulty. One is conflicts that are very difficult to resolve, and are often prolonged and protracted. The second is that the flows of population are becoming more complicated to manage. There are more causes, as was mentioned, including climate change that move people along. We need – I know I get this question all the time – we need to uphold the refugee definition that is enshrined in the international legal system because it is strong, and we can leverage it in our discussions with States. We are not always successful, but we can use it. But we have to recognize also that many other people on the move have vulnerabilities and therefore need help.

Managing these flows has become more complicated, and it has become even more complicated for the third factor of complication, which the Secretary-General also alluded to, which is the stigmatization, the rejection, the use of refugees, but not just refugees – migrants and others – for political means. I spoke about it in my opening remarks. This of course, I always say, not only it's wrong, but actually it doesn't help at all address these problems in a more effective manner, which is what this compact and this forum aim at doing: to offer some very practical tools, supported by the international community, and exercised in many ways to manage in a more effective manner refugee flows.

You know the big elements of the compact that are now being rolled out, if you wish, in this Forum: broader coalitions of partners, not just the humanitarians dealing with the refugee crises, but also development institutions, the private sector, civil society and others, and all of them are hugely represented here in this Forum. Yesterday, we had a day almost entirely devoted to civil society and you could see how much enthusiasm and vibrancy there is around some of the initiatives they lead. The other thing the Compact and the Forum want to achieve is, I always say, is not anymore to bridge this gap between humanitarian and development. I think we have bridged it, we have the tools to bridge it, sorry, and now we need to do it. Now, we need development actors to come in very early in the emergencies, and we do have them and not small ones, but players like the World Bank, who made a very big pledge this morning, the Inter-American Development Bank... This is very significant, because it will allow us to mobilize this type of resources not after five years and ten years. The Secretary-General knows very well this is what happened with the Syria crisis and a lot of children didn't go to school for a

long time. Now we hope that with these new mechanisms, that are slow to put in place, but we are putting them in place, we can respond more effectively.

And I think the response we got around this forum is quite impressive: 3,000 participants registered. For UNHCR, this is the biggest event it has ever managed in its history, so it's quite significant. We estimate – because of course the Forum is still in progress so I cannot give you final figures, that's a bit premature, I'll do that tomorrow at the exit of the Forum, but we estimate that there's about 700 pledges. When I say pledges, it doesn't mean only money, it means legislation. You know, Ethiopia for example, has spoken about further legislation to include refugees in services and in the economy, just to give you an example because they spoke this morning. And it is resettlement to third countries. It is many ways that actors, participants, can pledge.

We launched yesterday, I just want to mention this, three platforms. These are three situations that are well known to us. One is the Afghan refugee situation, which is forty years old this year – very long, and very under-resourced and very difficult to find resources to help, in particular, the host countries. The other one is the Horn of Africa. IGAD, the regional organization is leading a very good initiative to bring States together to embrace the principles of the Compact. And the third platform, which we launched again, is a support platform towards what we are trying to do with other organizations in Central America to address this very complicated displacement situation, especially in Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Yesterday, we launched that. We also launched an academic network to try and be more structured and organized in our debate with academia, very important at this time of difficult policy debate. And another group called Asylum Support Group, that will concentrate on helping countries build up their asylum system. At a time when asylum systems are under attack, I think it's very important to have a group that can offer concrete solutions to States that are struggling with some of the problems. And let's not forget, we've said it so many times, the States that are really impacted are not the States in the Global North, are the poorer States that are near crises or in crises and are facing the big problems and they are the ones most in need of help. So, this a snapshot of what the Forum is now. It just started this morning. Tomorrow evening when it's over, and we have a more a complete picture of what has emerged we'll share that with you as well. Many thanks.

**Question:** Yes, Mr Grandi, Mr Secretary General, bonjour. Je vais vous poser la question en français. Le continent africain est celui qui regroupe le plus grand nombre de réfugiés et je voulais avoir votre avis, Monsieur le Secrétaire général ainsi que Monsieur Grandi, sur vos pronostics, justement, concernant la combinaison « augmentation des crises – particulièrement dans la région du Sahel –, ainsi que changement climatique ». Comme vous le savez, l'Afrique est particulièrement touchée et nous avons vu récemment que des camps où les réfugiés se trouvent ont été inondés par – justement – des pluies excessives, que ce soit en Afrique de l'est comme en Afrique de l'ouest.

**Secretary-General Guterres:** Je crois que l'on fait face dans la région du Sahel à une situation extrêmement difficile et extrêmement tragique. Du point de vue strictement sécuritaire, c'est évident

que la capacité sur le terrain – avec la combinaison de la MINUSMA, qui est une force de maintien de la paix au Mali, du G5 Sahel et de l'opération française Barkhane – est insuffisante face à la menace du terrorisme dans la région. Je me suis battu pour que le G5 Sahel puisse avoir été conçu avec un mandat plus fort et avec un financement garanti. Malheureusement, le G5 Sahel dépend de contributions volontaires et a des vulnérabilités qui sont évidentes à ce moment-là. On a vu le conflit se répandre, du Mali au Burkina, du Burkina aussi au Niger. Récemment, une attaque au Niger a causé 71 morts, soldats du Niger, et maintenant la menace se pose à la frontière des pays de la côte, de la Côte d'Ivoire, du Bénin, du Ghana. En outre, nous avons une situation où le changement climatique contribue à aggraver le rapport traditionnel entre éleveurs, en général peuls, et agriculteurs, qui sont aussi en général de groupes ethniques différents – et même au Nigéria de religions différentes –, ce qui crée un cadre qui aggrave les conflits et qui facilite l'implantation du terrorisme. Alors, face à cette situation, non seulement nous assistons à une dégradation du point de vue sécuritaire, il n'y a pas non plus suffisamment d'investissements en matière de développement et l'action humanitaire devient de plus en plus difficile pour des raisons de sécurité. Et naturellement, ça se traduit dans une croissance tragique du déplacement interne et externe avec des difficultés croissantes de réponse. C'est une grande préoccupation et j'espère que ce soit possible de revoir et la capacité de répondre avec un système sécuritaire renforcé – et je souligne d'ailleurs la contribution positive annoncée par les pays de l'ECOWAS – mais aussi avec un plus grand investissement pour le développement et une action humanitaire renforcée et en même temps que ce soit possible de trouver les mécanismes de coopération internationale qui le rendent possible.

**High Commissioner Grandi:** Juste pour dire que je suis d'accord, naturellement, avec le Secrétaire général. Juste pour dire que tout cela se traduit déjà dans une augmentation du déplacement. C'est clair, c'est comme le baromètre de ces crises. Donc, effectivement, on voit beaucoup de déplacements à l'intérieur du pays, au Burkina par exemple. On a déjà vu des réfugiés qui vont vers les États côtiers, pas beaucoup mais c'est déjà un symptôme et c'est pour ça que c'est important que cette crise soit traitée en priorité.

**Question:** President Erdogan of Turkey today said that a plan or a timetable for repatriating Syrian refugees, he said voluntarily, up to a million in what he said would be quickly. Can you comment please on the feasibility or the desirability of that given the situation on the ground and whether you think that would be implemented.

**High Commissioner Grandi:** Our position on return is – I don't know how many times I have laid it out here in this room - is always the same: return is voluntary. But President Erdogan said it very clearly himself. Return can only be voluntary from our perspective, which means that people can choose to return or not to return. This is their choice. Now, our position has always been as well that if people return to Syria, wherever they return, they deserve – they need, in fact - humanitarian support. And I hope that this continues to be accepted by everybody. So, whether they return from Turkey, wherever they go – preferably to their places of origin, naturally, which is where they usually want to go – they need support. And that support has been difficult to obtain. But I think humanitarian support should not be linked to any other considerations.

There is of course the question of what are the obstacles to this return, and we have also spoken many times about this issue. There is often an emphasis on material conditions, the reality is that there are other issues that need to be addressed - property issues, legal issues, documentation issues. Now, on all those issues we have actually been working with the Syrian authorities and will continue to do that. We are also encouraging the Syrian authorities to allow us presence in the areas where people return, because this could be a confidence-building measure.

Finally, there is the issue of reconstruction. This is more complex because, of course, Syria is not yet a resolved conflict, so reconstruction in a fully-fledged way clearly is linked to a longer-term process which needs to include a political solution. This is not up to me to advocate for, this is another discussion, but we are not yet there. But humanitarian assistance for those returning, wherever they are returning, from and to, needs to be provided, and we are ready to cooperation with the authorities to do that.

**Question:** Bonjour. On constate aujourd'hui qu'il y a ce premier Forum mondial sur les réfugiés. Il y a effectivement la présence du secteur privé. Or, c'est vrai que toute la question de l'implication du secteur privé dans les affaires onusiennes, ça date déjà des années 2000 avec le *Global Compact* et tout ça. Et je voulais savoir pourquoi finalement aujourd'hui il y a eu autant de retard dans l'implication du secteur privé ; pourquoi l'ONU ne s'est pas ouverte davantage plus tôt et a contrario pourquoi le secteur privé ne s'est pas intéressé plus tôt à ces affaires humanitaires ?

**Secretary-General Guterres:** Quand j'étais Haut-Commissaire aux réfugiés il y avait un grand nombre d'entreprises privées qui coopéraient déjà avec nous. Ce que nous voyons aujourd'hui, c'est l'effort non seulement du *Global Compact* mais aussi des différentes agences, le HCR, le PAM, l'UNICEF et d'autres ; c'est un grand effort pour mobiliser au maximum toutes les ressources disponibles du secteur privé et notamment l'expertise et les capacités d'action que le secteur privé a pour renforcer notre action humanitaire. Mais je crois que ce n'est pas une chose nouvelle. Mais il y a vraiment une accélération ; je crois que cette accélération vient d'une conscience accrue du secteur privé sur l'importance de l'ascension des responsabilités sociales et environnementales et, du point de vue des agences, aussi, d'une plus grande modernisation de leur travail.

High Commissioner Grandi: Et si je peux ajouter un point à cette réponse du Secrétaire général, c'est que je pense que – c'est pas nouveau non plus mais ça s'accélère – il y a une évolution de la philanthropie classique, qui était de donner des fonds, de l'argent, comme dons, à des partenariats qui sont justement plus complexes. Si vous avez entendu les *pledges* (engagements de contributions) qu'ils ont faits ce matin, c'est pas seulement des fonds, c'est vraiment travailler ensemble sur des situations. Ça c'est un peu aussi l'esprit du Pacte pour les réfugiés. Donc, ça c'est nouveau et c'est bien que le secteur privé soit inséré dans ce discours, de plus en plus je dirais. Donc c'est positif.

**Question:** One of the key things you have been asking for is more burden sharing, and this is, certainly in Europe, it is one of the trickiest issues to solve, and we have had no, and no and no again. What confidence do you have that you are going to get some pledges on this at the end of this summit?

**High Commissioner Grandi:** I think on the financial side, what we need to watch here is not so much the traditional contributions, because for that we already have our normal channels. We had a pledging conference a few days ago in which actually donors pledged more than a billion dollars to UNHCR programmes, so that continues. But it's more the additional contributions such as the pledges of the World Bank and the Inter-American Bank this morning and of other organizations. That is what we need to watch because this is burden sharing in a different way. I think that also, let us see how this platform works because this is really trying to pull together States from across the divide – donors, host countries - together in trying to solve some of the refugee situations. There are some aspects of burden sharing which I think are worrying and one is resettlement, unfortunately. Resettlement is a small solution. Every year, only a few tens of thousands of refugees get resettled, compared to 25 million is few, but it is very important. One because it is targeted at the most vulnerable people, and second because it is a gesture, precisely of burden sharing by States with more resources, with States, towards States that host the large numbers of refugees. So even, I have countless Governments telling me in the past it was easier for us to keep the border open and receive a lot of people because at least we could tell our population some people get resettled to Europe, to the United States, to Australia and other countries. These numbers are not growing and although we know that they will remain small, I would really like to make an appeal for this to be considered seriously.

**Secretary-General Guterres:** If I may make an additional comment, I think it is important to understand that we cannot have a concept of burden sharing based on the idea that developing countries keep the refugees and developed countries support financially the developing countries to keep the refugees. I think burden sharing is also for developed countries to have their borders open to asylum seekers seeking protection, and to give a fair treatment to their claims, because we cannot have two worlds. There is only one 51 Convention, there is only one protection regime for refugees, and it is necessary that all countries assume their responsibilities and that is why I have been saying time and time again that we need to re-establish the integrity of the refugee protection regime.

**Question:** Je voudrais juste poser une question à propos de la stratégie nationale qu'a adoptée le Maroc depuis 2014 pour les réfugiés et les immigrants. Comment vous voyez cette stratégie nationale et est-ce qu'elle doit être améliorée pour le futur ?

**High Commissioner Grandi:** Très simplement et brièvement, c'est pour dire que c'est positif. Le Maroc a vu une augmentation des demandes d'asile, dans le pays, considérable dans les dernières années, et nous avons travaillé très bien avec le Gouvernement marocain sur tous les aspects – législatifs, etc... - concernant l'accueil de ces réfugiés. Donc, c'est positif.

**Question:** Thank you very much, Mr. Guterres, Mr. Grandi. Mexico plays a key role with respect to refugees who come from Central America and want to go to the United States. One can say that before, the passage was kind of free. But now, due to Trump's pressures, the borders have been militarized, the *Guarda Nacional* is acting like a migratory police. About 70,000 people await asylum applications in USA. They are in cities in northern Mexico that are dangerous due to strong presence of organized crime. Children have been detained, families separated, the scenario is complicated. So, my question is: what do you think Mexico and the United States should do to fulfil their international obligations?

**Secretary-General Guterres:** To respect the integrity of the refugee protection regime.