

As delivered

**68th session of the Executive Committee
of the High Commissioner's Programme**

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**Closing Remarks
Geneva, 6 October 2017**

Madam Chairperson,

Thank you, on behalf of all of us, for so ably steering our discussions this week, and for your thoughtful insights. For my own part, I have greatly appreciated your advice and support throughout this year, and your dedicated commitment to the refugee cause.

I also wish to join everybody else in congratulating Ambassador Dalil of Afghanistan - a country which is very close to my heart - on her election as the new Chairperson of the Executive Committee, as well as Vice Chairperson Ambassador Delmi of Algeria, Ambassador Muylle of Belgium, our new Vice-Chairperson and our new Rapporteur, Mr. Moreno Gutierrez of Colombia. They will constitute an excellent Bureau. I look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Distinguished delegates,

I found our discussions this week constructive, concrete and rooted in practical experience. But let us not forget that as they took place, thousands of refugees continued to cross borders in search of protection, arriving in remote border communities around the world, or in sprawling cities affected by urban poverty, often joining refugee communities already uprooted by earlier waves of conflict or persecution, to which solutions have not yet been found.

It is good, therefore, that our exchanges were infused with a shared sense of urgency and common purpose. I am grateful to all of you for your insights, and your strong support to UNHCR.

I was also struck by the way in which the New York Declaration resonated in practically every statement as the foundation of a new model to address refugee crises. There was a firm recognition that it is time for change – and a clear convergence around the directions that we must pursue: easing pressure on host countries and communities; enhancing refugee self-reliance; expanding resettlement and other third country solutions; and creating conditions conducive to voluntary return.

All of these are urgent and equally important – and all are underpinned by the fundamental obligation to receive refugees and provide them with protection. I was glad to hear so many of you speak of your work to strengthen asylum systems and build progressive domestic policies. I am particularly grateful to those countries and regions that are already applying the Comprehensive Refugee Response model, as the instrument through which these new directions are now being tested and refined. I firmly believe that its practical application, combined with the lessons that we will draw from the thematic consultations, will result - must result - in a powerful Global Refugee Compact that has the potential to drive real change in the way that we respond to forced displacement.

Yet, this will only happen if these commitments are matched with concrete action. The countries and communities that receive and host refugees are the mainstays of the international protection regime, and their generosity is truly remarkable. As we have heard time and time again during these days, many are now pursuing important policies that foster refugee inclusion and self-reliance. But without sustained international support, and a genuine assumption of shared responsibility, the pillars that shore up this hospitality are inevitably weakened. We need to step up, and quickly – with efficient new financial instruments that can be rapidly – more rapidly – deployed, and decisive – more decisive – early engagement by development actors and the private sector. Expanding access to resettlement and other third country solutions is equally critical, and the sharp drop in resettlement places that has taken place this year must be urgently – I repeat – urgently redressed.

At the same time, humanitarian assistance must be sustained even as development action and other forms of support are progressively intensified. This is essential if we are to respond to the compelling humanitarian needs arising from new waves of crisis and displacement. I am deeply concerned about funding levels for major ongoing crises, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, as many of you have underlined. UNHCR's funding levels for the Central African Republic and Burundi situations, for example, stand at just 9% and 11% respectively at the beginning of October. For South Sudan, and the neighbouring countries hosting 2 million South Sudanese refugees, it is scarcely better, at 31%. The resources available for Syria and its neighbouring refugee-hosting countries are also lagging significantly behind last year's levels – this at a time when we are confronted by a massive new refugee influx from Myanmar into Bangladesh. Responding to this emergency and supporting solutions for it will also require substantial funding.

I am grateful that many delegations took this up in their statements, and also for the assurances given by some donors on their commitment to providing flexible un-earmarked funds, enabling us to deliver a global response that is driven by compelling protection priorities.

Our discussions also touched on the complex challenges to protection that we have seen emerging in many countries and regions, and which Assistant High Commissioner Volker Türk eloquently spoke about yesterday. As I participated in the General Debate, I was struck by the fact that many States

are at the same time humanitarian donors, providers of bilateral development support, resettlement countries, refugee-receiving countries, and even refugee-producing countries. Yet we often observe disconnects between these various aspects, and in particular between refugee policy abroad, and refugee policy at home. As we pursue a broader more comprehensive approach to addressing refugee crises, I would also like to reiterate my call for a 'whole of government' approach to refugee protection that brings greater coherence between these various aspects.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

In my opening remarks I highlighted that we are in an extremely fluid situation in which displacement continues at high levels, and protection is coming under pressure as international cooperation wanes and fragmented, state-by-state responses to refugee flows emerge, often driven by short-term political agendas. The political will to resolve conflicts and bring about solutions is in short supply, yet in some situations we see premature pressure for returns to risky and unsustainable situations.

In this difficult context, please do not forget that my mandate as High Commissioner for providing international protection and pursuing solutions, as entrusted by you, as Member States, remains a critical instrument. As we work to engage more and more actors and entities in providing a comprehensive response to refugee flows, there will certainly be a need for UNHCR to re-orient how we engage, to ensure that we are able to play the catalytic role called for in this new environment. But in doing so, we must – you must - continue to ensure the space for our distinct protection mandate to be fully exercised – including through robust operational engagement and the provision of cash, services and material assistance where needed.

Here, our presence and role in the field also remain critical, and I wish to add my own voice to that of the many delegations who shared their appreciation for the work of the UNHCR teams around the world, the majority working directly with refugees, displaced and stateless people, often in remote and difficult locations.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Our exchanges this week painted a sober picture of the immense challenges we are facing. This is important. Aspirations are not enough – we have to be realistic, and constantly take stock of where we are making progress, and where we are falling short.

Throughout this EXCOM I had a strong sense that last year's 'New York spirit' is not lost – and that amidst many difficulties, we have reached a shared understanding that only by working together can we find solutions to forced displacement that are in everybody's interest, and place the rights, interests

and perspectives of refugees and internally displaced people at the centre of our efforts.

I thank you all for your confidence in UNHCR.