

Statement by Delegation of Thailand
Mr. Rongvudhi Virabutr,
Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative, Chargé d'affaires a.i.
to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva,
at the General Debate, 72nd Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee,
6 October 2021, (Remote participation - LIVE)
(5 minutes)

Madam Chair,
High Commissioner,
Distinguished Delegates,

1. I would like to begin by congratulating Madam Chair and the Bureau for successfully steering the Executive Committee through a particularly challenging year. I also wish to express my appreciation to the High Commissioner for his commitments and devotion to protect the rights and promote the livelihood of refugees, displaced persons and stateless persons around the world.
2. Thailand shares the concerns of other delegations on the COVID-19 pandemic as well as emerging situations of conflict and instability and their impacts on the plight of refugees around the world. We have joined in making **contributions to address the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan**. As for issues under the UNHCR's mandate in Southeast Asia region, I wish to make a few points.
3. First, Thailand closely follows developments in Myanmar. Humanitarian assistance is much needed there to save lives and prevent further suffering. We therefore **call on the international community to provide assistance to the people of Myanmar in a timely and impartial manner**. On our part, Thailand has already provided 2 million US dollars through bilateral channels, ASEAN, and international organizations since early this year.
4. We have also been prepared for possible **influxes** of people fleeing violence on the ground. An **SOP** has been developed to provide guidelines for agencies to handle the situation and provide **humanitarian assistance** in accordance with our humanitarian tradition, international obligations and domestic laws.
5. Second, while the work of the bilateral mechanism between Thailand and Myanmar to **repatriate Myanmar Displaced Persons (MDPs)** has been stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic and situation in Myanmar, we have not been idle. Our focus has been adjusted towards the **prevention of COVID and other communicable diseases** in the temporary shelters and **skills development for the MDPs** to prepare them for the future. In this regard, Thailand **appreciates the role of the UNHCR and other partners for their longstanding support** to the Thai Government in looking after almost 80,000 MDPs who still remain in our care.

6. I am also pleased to report that less than 1 percent of people in the 9 temporary shelters have been infected by **COVID-19** so far. All those infected have been given **treatment**. A number of people in the shelters have been vaccinated - thanks to the strong advocacy by the UNHCR to secure vaccine supplies from the Chulabhorn Royal Academy, not only for people living in the shelters but also for groups that might be vulnerable in urban setting.

7. Third, work has been ongoing to operationalize the **National Screening Mechanism** in early 2022. We **appreciate** close cooperation and technical support of the **UNHCR in the drafting of the criteria and procedures**. This mechanism will directly benefit concerned individuals in urban contexts by granting appropriate legal status that will allow them to stay in the country and have access to basic services while awaiting sustainable solutions.

8. Fourth, the issue of **stateless persons** remains high on our agenda. Since 1992, almost 300,000 stateless persons have already been granted Thai nationality. Earlier this year, the Cabinet approved the **revised criteria for the determination of legal status** that will ease the process and remove bureaucratic blockage that affects the remaining persons without nationality.

9. We are **grateful for the UNHCR's "Statelessness Reduction and Community Sensitization Project"** which complements the Government's efforts through awareness raising and provision of legal and administrative support to individual applicants. We look forward to building on such initiative to accelerate Thailand's progress in the elimination of statelessness, in line with our pledges under #IBelong Campaign.

10. Fifth, the situation of those displaced from **Rakhine State** remains a concern. Despite a **significant reduction of incidents at sea** during the past year, our **authorities remain vigilant for smuggling and trafficking activities**. We stand ready to provide humanitarian assistance and urge the international community to provide support to the host communities and countries, while continuing to address the root causes and find sustainable solutions.

Madam Chair,

11. Thailand remains committed to supporting the work of the UNCHR, including its **renewed five Strategic Directions**. It will be only through collective efforts that we can overcome challenges of the pandemic era and achieve sustainable solutions for people who are in need of protection.

Thank you.

(707 words)