

17 OCTOBER 2023 | BANGKOK, THAILAND

Closing Speech of the High-Level Meeting on Rohingya Refugees by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. Filippo Grandi

Good evening, everybody. Good afternoon, and thank you so much for patiently attending today all the way to the end.

I'm really very impressed. I think many of us have been impressed by the turnout and also by the strong commitment that we have heard, that we have shown, for Rohingya refugees in the region and for those that are hosting them.

My thanks again to the United Kingdom and the United States for co-hosting. Thanks to my colleagues in the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, led by Indrika, for the excellent organization. Thank you, Ellen, as well for all your work and everybody else.

Colleagues and friends, we have heard important statements today, some 160 delegates from Member States, refugee-led organizations, national and international organizations, national and international NGOs.

That's how I came with this little bag. Allow me to pay special tribute to BRAC for its critical role, but also international financial institutions, United Nations organizations, the private sector, think tanks and others all were here clearly with a common purpose: Support the Rohingya refugees and their very generous host communities.

There were a number of important points, many of which are summarized in the Chair's Summary, which will be made available to everybody.

But allow me to recall a few key elements from what we heard.

First – and that's very important, agreement that the solution to the problem and the solution to displacement rests in Myanmar. Agreement that the refugees in the largest part want to return home eventually and that much more must be done inside Myanmar, in line with the Rakhine Commission Recommendations to ensure their safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return.

UNHCR and UNDP are committed to continuing their work inside Myanmar to improve the conditions in Rakhine State and elsewhere. But we need more on the part of the Myanmar authorities, Central, Federal, local. And we also need more international help to continue these activities.

Second – a realistic acknowledgment that voluntary return in the current circumstances is not going to happen on a large scale, very quickly. We must therefore continue to guarantee international protection for those who have fled and provide much more humanitarian support to refugees and to their host communities, including with a focus on the devastating impact of the climate emergency.

We must all work to create and expand opportunities for people to live more fulfilling lives while in exile, with improved access to education, skills, training and livelihoods so that there are better resourced and prepared for their return to Myanmar.

In this context, I heard a number of important commitments from the major host countries in the region who, let's not forget, are bearing the burden of refugees.

I welcome the words of the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh who referenced the important role that international financial institutions can play in support to host communities and refugees in his country.

This will help local communities and will build the resilience of refugees, and I hope and trust that the entire international community will support bilateral efforts in this regard.

A reminder, this is money, this is funding that is separate from and in addition to the humanitarian portfolio and the joint response program. It is actually an opportunity for much larger levels of assistance to truly help improve lives of host communities and refugees.

I also very much the Foreign Minister's important words concerning resettlement for some and critically on improving access to education for all and skills development as well commensurate with the needs also in Myanmar.

The Malaysian delegation spoke very importantly about extending the right to work for Rohingya while waiting for a durable solution.

Thailand spoke of the importance of child development for Rohingya and about their efforts to support the response in Bangladesh, as well as the creation of conditions conducive to for return in Rakhine state.

Indonesia mentioned a dialog it has maintained this year around advancing solutions for Rohingya refugees, and I am really grateful to Indonesia for this important effort. They made a call for ASEAN, including through the AHA Center, to continue to engage, to step up their engagement in concrete ways in this direction.

India has also engaged in the humanitarian and development program in Rakhine State, while continuing to advocate for upholding the right to return to Myanmar of Rohingya refugees.

I also thank those donor governments who for continuing to support the Joint Response Plan.

I cannot overemphasize the urgency for more humanitarian assistance, as was highlighted by many speakers, including myself, the Joint Response Program is just 42% funded. This is the lowest level of funding the JRP has faced since its first launch – which I remember was in October 2017.

42 per cent funded. This is not enough. I understand the pressure that donor budgets are under. I understand that all have been, or many, not all, have been generous for six years.

But I do hope that you will not be too much distracted by other crises. Unfortunately, crises are emerging one after the other, and we're all facing a phenomenally complicated and tragic crisis in the Middle East as we speak.

But please don't move from one crisis to the other, forgetting what is before. It's, not the humanitarians' fault that crises are accumulating most, unfortunately.

And please therefore continue to maintain focused financial and especially political on the plight of some of the most destitute, disadvantaged, disadvantaged and dispossessed people in the world. The Rohingya.

Let us not forget, by the way, that we do have Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, in Indonesia, in India, in Thailand, and response is there to need to be adequately funded.

This is not something that we can delay or put aside for a more convenient time. Already we see the dramatically negative impact on those living in the camps. Those living further afield, and those in particular taking the desperate journeys by sea in the hope of a chance at a better life.

We must help and we must do so now.

Colleagues, as you know, and as was very much mentioned, the timing of today's meeting is deliberate. We're just weeks away from the second Global Refugee Forum and the discussions here today come and must also act as catalyst for a greater focus and attention at the forum.

In the weeks leading up to the GRF, my teams will be working with your suggestions and we will be they will be reaching out to you.

The so called – this is a bit of a mouthful – Multi-Stakeholder Pledge for Rohingya Refugees and their host communities, which is titled Expanded Solutions and Enhanced Resilience, calls for a shift to transform the Rohingya response into comprehensive and coordinated action for resilience and for solutions.

I invite all of you to join this pledge meaningfully, substantially.

A meaningful pledge tabled at the Global Refugee Forum will be a tangible demonstration of the political will for collective responses.

Finally, I think that there is one more element of today's meeting that is important and must be recognized and echoed by all.

That is a message of solidarity with the Rohingya people wherever they are. A message that the international community and here, among us, is a true cross-section of that: States NGOs, refugee-led organizations and others. It's a message that this international community has not forgotten or forsaken the Rohingya people to hardship and suffering.

But rather that we are all committed to improving conditions in exile while also never stopping to find solutions.

I therefore encourage each of you, I challenge each of us, especially and including myself, my colleagues, to ensure that we not only speak to each other here, but we deliver to the Rohingya in the field, in India, in Indonesia and Malaysia, in Thailand, especially in Bangladesh and of course in Myanmar, their own country.

Thank you again for your participation and commitment and I look forward to seeing you all and hearing from you in Geneva in December.

Thank you.