

Germany

**UNHCR Exekutivrat – High level segment zur afghanischen
Flüchtlingssituation**

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. High Commissioner, honorable Ministers,
Excellencies, Heads of Agencies, Delegates,

2015 is characterized by a new global peak in forcibly displaced persons and humanitarian crises. Being confronted with numerous additional challenges resulting from these acute simultaneous crises, Germany welcomes the fact that this year's theme of the High level segment calls to mind the situation of Afghan refugees, particularly in the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran.

Firstly, Germany would like to thank the governments and also the people of Iran and Pakistan for hosting more than 90% of the Afghan refugees. In hosting the refugees, your countries assume the biggest share of the international solidarity needed to help displaced Afghan people in need.

Secondly, we highly welcome the renewed commitment of the Afghan Government of National Unity to list voluntary repatriation and reintegration of its citizens among its highest national priorities. We believe that voluntary repatriation, if conditions allow, is a preferable solution to sustainably overcome this protracted refugee situation. In this regard we highly welcome the constructive talks between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the UNHCR and encourage to continue to work on durable solutions for the refugees in Pakistan.

Thirdly, Germany commends UNHCR for the great success of having assisted over 5.8 million Afghan refugees in returning home to Afghanistan. Germany agrees that it is of great importance to further carry forward this success story.

We also agree with UNHCR that multiple challenges as described by the honorable Ministers of Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan lie ahead of us. We believe that the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees is the appropriate tool to tackle these challenges.

At the UNHCR Ministerial Conference in 2011 Germany pledged to support the UNHCR country programs in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. Germany has honored these commitments and has financially supported UNHCR both with regard to refugees in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan as well as with regard to IDPs and returnees in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Besides, Germany is one of the biggest bilateral donors for the UNHCR/UNDP program RAHA (Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas) in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan - with over 30 million Euro since 2011. The program aims at improving the livelihoods of Afghan refugees as well as of the Pakistani population within the hosting communities. This is being achieved through enhancing health, sanitation, improved infrastructure and access to education. This year, Germany has committed 12 million Euro through UNHCR specifically to support repatriation of refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Furthermore, Germany supports the rehabilitation and reintegration of IDPs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan with 10 million Euro.

Germany will continue to support the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. To our understanding, education plays a key role in enabling durable solutions and we will therefore continue to promote the access to education for forcibly displaced persons, both financially and conceptually.

Particularly in the fields of youth empowerment, education and creation of livelihood opportunities we will continue to support the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its commitment to create the necessary conditions for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in the country.

One example in this regard is our long-term support through the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative called DAFI. DAFI provides scholarships for refugees who want to continue their studies at universities or colleges in the host country. In 2014, Afghan refugees continued to represent the largest nationality among DAFI students, totaling almost 20% of the global DAFI students. They pursued their studies primarily in Iran and Pakistan.

Without lasting peace, security, and a sustainable development in Afghanistan, however, we will neither be able to prevent a further increase of people leaving the country, nor will solutions for the returnees and remaining Afghan refugees be realistic.

International and Afghan efforts have led to visible improvements over the last decade – life expectancy has increased considerably; maternal deaths have declined significantly; 9 million boys and girls have access to primary education.

However, we are concerned about the deteriorating security situation in some areas. The developments in Kunduz over the last ten days have been extremely disconcerting. Let me take this opportunity to extend my sincere condolences to the families of the soldiers, policemen and civilians who were killed during these atrocious attacks by the Taliban. Our thoughts are with the citizens of Kunduz who suffer the consequences of this senseless fighting, especially the victims among the staff and patients of the MSF hospital.

The difficult security situation is one of the main reasons behind the rising number of Afghans leaving their country. Many of those Afghans trying to reach Europe are educated, middle-class young Afghans who came of age after 9/11. They are badly needed for the reconstruction and the economic development of Afghanistan. Their leaving further underlines the necessity of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, of providing Afghans with the prospect of a future in their own country.

Excellencies, please let me assure you that Germany remains committed to peace and stability in Afghanistan. We will continue our financial assistance and our support for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces in the years ahead. Let me be clear - we will stand by Afghanistan in the future as we have done in the past.

But let me add one thing – we are convinced that there is no durable military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, a political process is essential for stabilizing the situation in the long run.

I say this, fully aware that the courageous Afghan decision to initiate peace talks earlier this year has been thwarted by hostile actions of the insurgency as the attacks in Kabul or the assault on Kunduz. Still, I would like to encourage you to go the extra mile, to explore all possibilities for a resumption of the talks. I also appeal to the neighboring states to lend their support to a durable political solution in Afghanistan as the only way to ensure stability and economic prosperity in the region as a whole.

It is our joint responsibility to do everything in our power to provide the Afghan people with a political and an economic perspective in safety and dignity in their own country; otherwise the number of those who will leave their homes might grow again - adding to the hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants which are currently risking their lives in search for a better future outside their own country.