



Permanent Mission of India
Geneva

Statement by India at the General Debate of the 69th Annual Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees programme – Delivered by Dr. Sadre Alam, First Secretary

(Geneva, Switzerland, 1-5 October, 2018)

Madam Chair,

2. We thank the High Commissioner for his opening statement and welcome the Republic of Zimbabwe as the new member of the ExCom.
3. The increase in global refugees by a fifth, crossing 25 million is concerning. Around 86% of these are hosted in low and middle income countries and close to conflict situations. A large number of them remain in protracted situations and only a very small proportion are able to return or be resettled.
4. A sixth of the ‘persons of concern’ are hosted in our region while not even a tenth of the total UNHCR budget is allocated to it. The expenditure as a percentage of the available funds and the budget is the lowest among all regions. This, in addition, to being testimony to the fact that most of the burden is being borne by countries themselves, is clearly not equitable sharing of burden. We request the UNHCR to review this situation.
5. Despite substantially increased staffing and funding, the former increasing by around 59 percent and the latter more than doubling since 2010, resource gaps persist. UNHCR needs to bring in greater efficiencies and systemic coherence. In this regard, we urge UNHCR to help build, strengthen and use national capacities and work with local responders on a much larger scale which will also help in ensuring localization of solutions and ownership of the process. It should adequately support and assist host States in ensuring protection to refugees and unburdening them.
6. We welcome the increase in the use of Cash Based Interventions. UNHCR should seek voluntary funding which is un-earmarked and for a longer term to

ensure greater flexibility, predictability and continuity in humanitarian response and avoid any potential conflict of interest.

Madam Chair,

7. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) provides an opportunity to change the 'business as usual' approach. Being a non-negotiated outcome of a UNHCR led iterative consultative process, its strength would lie in its consensual adoption premised on international solidarity and national ownership.

8. As the Compact is legally non-binding and apolitical and non-prescriptive in nature, its implementation and follow-up and review should be in keeping with this spirit. The actions and contributions expected of and made by Member States under the Compact should be consistent with their obligations under international refugee law.

9. Further, in the context of refugees, we need to be careful with the usage of expressions like 'mixed migration', 'people on the move' and 'forced displacement' which do not even have agreed definitions and are understood differently.

Madam Chair,

10. A number of States, not parties to the international refugee instruments, have shown a generous approach to hosting refugees. India is one of them with a continuing long tradition of playing host to a large number of refugees despite developmental and security related challenges. We continue to host them, entirely, using our own resources. Needless to add that India is not a source of refugees.

11. UNHCR's reported 'monitoring' of the situation in one of our provinces is an overreach clearly beyond the mandate and its perception of 'initial exclusion' of individuals from the draft National Register of Citizens premature, ill-informed and tendentious. We are a responsible State with a functional democracy and rule of law. The Government of India has provided for a due process for the examination of claims and objections, if any, to the register and other remedies, a fact well known and adequately clarified at the highest levels.

12. UNHCR needs to prioritize activities to fulfill its core mandate and to end statelessness and the growing refugee problem.

13. The change process initiated by the High Commissioner to decentralize the organization is a positive development.

14. To take this process to its logical conclusion, we call for a comprehensive strategic review of UNHCR in the next decennial review in 2023 or earlier, particularly in the context of its indefinite and expanding mandate beyond the 1950 statute's core mandate, overlapping and multiple reporting and governance mechanisms, potential organizational conflicts of interest, the need and capacity to address the root causes of the problem and the GCR, in order to make UNHCR more universal and effective. UNHCR should become leaner, 'fit for purpose' and Member State led and driven.

15. Finally, we take this opportunity to renew India's commitment to the protection of refugees and cooperation with UNHCR in discharging its core mandate and look forward to a constructive engagement during this 69th session of the ExCom.

Thank you.

03 October 2018
