

UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
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Statement of Latvia

Thank you, Mr.Chairperson!

Latvia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and its Member States.

Latvia congratulates Mr. Grandi with the appointment and thanks him for the timely and visionary statement.

The New York Declaration encourages to accept migration primarily as a right based either on free choice or forced circumstances. The “people first” and “people in the centre” are the interwoven messages of the Declaration.

A migrant, a refugee or a border guard are all human beings in the first place. They all have their dignity and their fundamental human rights that should be respected at all times no matter what.

Mr.Chair,

The elaboration of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration should fully integrate Geneva-based migration expertise not least of the leading actors in the field, such as the International Organization for Migration and the UNHCR.

The states bear the responsibility to integrate refugees and the accepted migrants, providing access to education, health care, justice and language training. These measures reduce the risks of marginalization and radicalization, therefore they are all the more important to be implemented thoroughly and in accordance with high quality standards.

States maintain the right to decide on the status of the persons received, bearing in mind also security concerns. And both refugees and migrants have the obligation to observe the laws and regulations of their host countries. Traditions and cultural differences should not serve as a pretext for a flexible application of the law, especially international law effective in the host country.

Integration is a two way street requiring lots of good will, empathy, willingness to step into the other's shoes and accept compromises on the both sides. It should not be perceived as effortless process. Only then it may bear mutually beneficial results, or "win-win" solutions.

Mr.Chair,

Latvia has contributed 50 000 EUR to the UNHCR Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan to assist Syrian refugees. Latvia has also welcomed refugees from Syria, Eritrea and other countries of origin.

While the Government still adapts looking for the most appropriate integration solutions to offer, some of our non-governmental organizations are in the forefront of making the newly welcomed people feel at home as much as possible.

The social movement launched on Facebook "I want to help refugees" arranges sports games, cultural events and seasonal festivities involving volunteers from Latvia happy to contribute first and foremost their free time but also whatever else is needed by the newly arrived people. The movement focuses on getting to know each other in an informal and friendly manner. Some Latvian families share their homes with the families of displaced people once a decision on their status in Latvia has been taken. There are numerous beautiful stories of sharing, acceptance and friendship.

While the humanitarian situation in Syria merits focused attention, situation in Ukraine should also be kept in our sight. The number and structure of displaced people there, mostly elderly and children, and their suffering continues to be a cause for great concern.

Mr. Chair,

Latvia welcomes the global UNHCR #WithRefugees campaign to promote responsibility sharing. It addresses the best of sense of solidarity in every human being. Indeed, the way we communicate and deliver messages may have long term implications.

That said adaptation of campaign slogans to local circumstances if at all necessary should be done with full understanding of the local specificities and the perceptions of the local population. Otherwise, well intended initiative may turn into anti-campaign damaging the image of

the organization on the one hand while appearing as a waste of the scarce financial resources on the other.

With the clearly increased workload and also budget of the UNHCR, the importance of priority setting and risk analysis increases accordingly. So does the importance of transparency and open, engaged communication with the stakeholders.

Mr. Chair,

Latvia strongly supports UNHCR's Campaign to End Statelessness #IBelong. Latvia has acceded to the both statelessness conventions.¹ Even though Latvia hosts a small number of stateless people,² less than 200, they are being taken good care of: they are being registered with their applications examined free of charge, and ultimately offered avenues for acquiring Latvian citizenship in due time. Children of stateless parents are granted Latvian citizenship simultaneously with birth registration.

As a member of the Friends of the Campaign group and as a tireless advocate for the mainstreaming of gender equality, Latvia co-sponsored the UN Human Rights Council Resolution on the right to a nationality.³ The current dynamic developments catalyse the necessity to involve women on a fully equal footing. The gender biased approaches should be regarded as a distorted luxury of the past. We do not need that any longer, today.

Thank you.

¹ 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

² 178 on 1 July 2016

³ The UN Human Rights Council Resolution on the right to a nationality: women's equal nationality rights in law and in practice A/HRC/C/L.12