

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

U.S. Delegation Statement

UNHCR's 2018 Executive Committee

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For millions of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons around the world, the state of their international protection is bleak. The conflicts and atrocities they have suffered continue to fester. From ethnic cleansing in Burma to the use of chemical weapons and siege of cities in Syria, from attacks on aid workers in South Sudan to attacks on dissidents in Venezuela, the scale and severity of abuses is alarming. Durable solutions to conflicts and displacement are relatively few and far between. For another year, the scale of forcible displacement has reached record numbers, and the pace is not slowing.

From this somber scene, we look to UNHCR. With immense and growing needs for international protection, UNHCR's protection mandate is more important than ever. The UN Secretary General's annual report on the protection of civilians called on Member States to increase their protection advocacy, and re-affirmed the centrality of protection in UN efforts. The report recognizes – as we all must – the dire global situation of forced displacement and its consequences for humanity.

The United States remains committed to the protection of those forced to flee from their homes because of persecution and conflict. We are committed to

supporting UNHCR's mandates to protect refugees and stateless persons, and its responsibility for the protection of internally displaced persons. We continue to provide significant financial support and to advocate strongly for protection and solutions for UNHCR's populations of concern, and we echo the Secretary General's call for Member States to increase their protection advocacy. We further call on Member States to increase their contributions in support of UNHCR's mandate – both in terms of financial support and in their humanitarian diplomacy.

Protection of those most vulnerable must remain at the heart of every humanitarian response. UNHCR's protection role is essential in this regard, and we appreciate UNHCR's efforts to maintain and promote the centrality of protection. The application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, and the “whole of society” approach to responses to forced displacement bring new actors with new lines of effort and exciting opportunities for innovation. We are counting on UNHCR to ensure that protection remains at the core of international responses to displacement. We rely on UNHCR to catalyze and coordinate actors across the humanitarian development nexus, across the spectrum from local to international organizations, to keep protection front and center in every response.

UNHCR's joint project with the World Food Program on “Mitigating the Risks of Abuse of Power in Cash Assistance” is a good example of the important role UNHCR must play to promote protection by working with financial service

providers, regulators, and other diverse actors. The United States is pleased to serve on the steering committee for this project.

We continue to support UNHCR's work to strengthen protection of internally displaced persons through its leadership of the Global Protection Cluster. As we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, we look forward to an update of UNHCR's IDP policy that is comprehensive and reflects meaningful consultations with NGOs and other partner organizations.

We also continue to support UNHCR's statelessness mandate and efforts to accelerate momentum in its #IBelong Global Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024. To achieve the goals outlined in UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, protection advocacy must be matched with greater resource allocation. We continue to urge UNHCR to prioritize statelessness activities within its country operations, and we call on Member States to increase their support for these activities, including by joining the Group of Friends of the campaign here in Geneva.

As we consider the global landscape of forced displacement and statelessness - acknowledging both the protracted nature of many situations as well as the dire conditions from which millions of individuals and families have fled - we must avoid the temptation to press prematurely for returns of individuals to the

countries or regions they fled. Whether Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Colombia, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria or elsewhere, UNHCR plays a critical role to ensure that refugee and IDP returns are voluntary, informed, and conducted in conditions of safety and dignity.

Finally, if we as Member States, as hosts and as donors, truly want to bend the trajectory of global displacement, we need to invest political capital in achieving peace and security in countries of origin. As Secretary of State Pompeo said on September 17:

“The United States is steadfast in prioritizing a course of action that enables the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their home countries if and when conditions permit – a solution that most refugees prefer. This strategy reflects our deep commitment to achieving optimal humanitarian outcomes. The best way to help most people is to promote burden sharing with partners and allies, [and] to work to end conflicts that drive displacement in the first place....”