

Chairperson's summary of the general debate

It is clear from the thoughtful and passionate statements over the last few days that your support for refugees, the internally displaced and stateless people is strong and unwavering. More than 150 delegations took the floor to convey both concern and encouragement. You touched upon many important issues, and I will attempt to summarize some of the highlights of what we have heard.

I would like to begin with the High Commissioner's opening remarks, in which he reminded us that forced displacement remains a global concern – driven and shaped by many overlapping elements. He stressed that addressing refugee crises cannot be done in isolation from tackling other global challenges, including migration, poverty, the climate emergency and other complexities. Protecting the forcibly displaced is vital but, as the High Commissioner reminded us, this must be accompanied by a deeper and wider scope of action that cuts across the political, security, migration and development spheres.

In this respect, the High Commissioner appealed to us to embrace the commitment to international solidarity through the powerful tool that is the Global Compact on Refugees, which will prove that we are stronger when we work together.

(Statelessness)

The high-level segment on statelessness marked the halfway point of UNHCR's #IBelong campaign, a bold ambition to end statelessness by 2024. During the high-level segment, we heard from a compelling panel about the importance of resolving this global issue, which was further illustrated by a moving first-hand account of what it means to be stateless and obtain a nationality. You emphasized that it is the legal and moral obligation of all States to ensure that every human being enjoys this fundamental right. We were also reminded of the valuable skills and resources that stateless people can contribute to countries that are willing to give them that true sense of belonging. The High Commissioner and the Deputy Secretary-General urged us to redouble our collective efforts to end statelessness in the remaining five years of the campaign.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In your statements over the past days, many of you underscored tangible efforts being made in the context of the #IBelong campaign to prevent statelessness and resolve existing protracted situations of statelessness. This includes measures to ensure registration at birth and remove gender discrimination from nationality laws. And in a remarkable display of renewed commitment to end statelessness in the next five years, States and partners made over 300 pledges. To that end, we heard numerous promising examples of legislative and operational advancements to support these efforts. You – the international community – have responded overwhelmingly in support of this ambitious goal. And through your efforts this goal can and will be achieved.

As we seek to fulfill the promise made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to “leave no one behind”, let us keep in mind the words of this year's Nansen Refugee Award winner, Mr. Azizbek Ashurov, who simply put it: “citizenship is not a privilege, it is a necessity.”

[Protection]

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

You expressed serious concern that the number of people displaced around the world has again reached record levels, referring to this as an “alarm bell” that should mobilize the entire international community into action. Addressing the root causes of displacement was highlighted as a priority, particularly ending armed conflict. As the High Commissioner noted, “ensuring the safety of the displaced, and

resolving displacement, were among the earliest priorities of the United Nations”. Seven decades on, these objectives remain more relevant than ever.

You reiterated that protection must be at the heart of humanitarian action. One participant candidly shared his own experience – having been internally displaced, becoming a refugee and finally, being able to return home – reminding us that our collective efforts towards the protection of refugees has a real human impact. It was also inspiring to hear from the many delegations that expressed a sustained commitment to keeping their borders open to refugees – despite strained capacity and resources. For some, this reflects a longstanding tradition of solidarity. For others, it is simply, “a matter of compassion.”

The complexity of mixed movements of refugees and migrants was cause for concern. You also emphasized the importance of addressing the situation of those with special needs, including people living with disabilities and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Many of you noted recent efforts to strengthen the humanitarian response to sexual and gender-based violence and called for further action to this end. Combatting exploitation and human trafficking was also essential. You also reminded us that a holistic response should include mental health and psychosocial support for refugees. And you welcomed the creative solutions that are being developed to address the protection problems faced by displaced youth, including obstacles to integration in host communities and the lack of education and livelihood opportunities.

[Internal displacement]

Many of you voiced concern about the rising number of people around the world who have been displaced internally within their own countries as a result of both conflict and climate-related disasters. You urged us not to lose sight of the internally displaced, cautioning that they are often even more vulnerable than refugees due to insecurity and the lack of humanitarian access.

UNHCR’s new policy on engaging with internally displaced persons was welcomed. At the same time, you urged the organization to find better ways to protect the internally displaced and to engage in this issue with the same consistency and fervour as it does for refugees. We heard from you that internal displacement requires global attention, strong inter-agency collaboration, and concrete recommendations on how the international community can better support States to prevent, address and find solutions. To that end, you welcomed the establishment of a United Nations High-Level Panel on IDPs.

(Emergency response, funding and support for host countries)

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

You praised UNHCR’s life-saving emergency response to the immense humanitarian needs around the world and commended the efforts of the dedicated humanitarian aid workers on the front lines.

The shortage of funding, in particular the lack of resources available for the African continent, was nevertheless the source of grave concern. In this respect, you welcomed UNHCR’s efforts to attract new donors, forge non-traditional partnerships and develop innovative funding mechanisms. In the context of the “grand bargain”, many delegations affirmed their continued commitment to providing predictable, unearmarked funding to enable coordinated, rapid and effective assistance.

While appealing to the international community to provide greater support for ongoing emergencies, you also stressed the importance of resolving protracted displacement refugee situations, particularly in developing countries that are struggling and lack resources. It was noted that developing countries continue to host 85 per cent of the world’s refugee population. You commended their continued leadership and hospitality, and called for further solidarity and support for host countries.

You encouraged States to consider measures to include refugees in national programmes, including health and education, while calling on development partners to strengthen programmes aiming at empowering refugees and supporting self-reliance. One country reminded us that providing education and a means of dignified living is an investment in regional and global security.

You highlighted the importance of data collection and analysis in large forced displacement situations as key in building new and inclusive approaches that serve both refugees and host communities. In this context you expressed your support for the World Bank - UNHCR Joint Data Center.

(Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Refugee Forum)

Many of you expressed hope – and, in fact, provided clear evidence – that the Global Compact on Refugees is a tool to realize the principle of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing, and to strengthen the response to forced displacement, while supporting host countries and communities.

There was broad support for the concept of inclusion and the “whole-of-society” approach envisioned in the Global Compact on Refugees. In this context, and recognizing the need to empower the people UNHCR serves, you appreciated the efforts to support the inclusion of refugee voices in the Global Refugee Forum.

There was tangible anticipation in the air with regard to the upcoming Global Refugee Forum. One delegation referred to it as a “wakeup call” towards achieving the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. You noted that, in addition to the concrete pledges anticipated, the Forum would also provide an important opportunity to take stock of the progress made and share good practices. At the same time, you pointed to the challenge of linking pledges with the real needs of refugees and host communities. As one delegation emphasized, it is our collective responsibility to respond to the needs of those who are forced to flee. They do not need empty words, but real change and significant and quantifiable action.

(Solutions)

You also stressed that the refugee issue is global and, therefore, the search for solutions should equally be global. In this regard, the international community was urged to “step up” and fulfill its responsibilities by ensuring the availability of durable solutions, including increasing the number of resettlement places. One delegation reminded us that solutions are only available to a minority, while the majority continue to wait.

There was also a strong plea for the international community to redouble its efforts in creating the conditions in countries of origin conducive to supporting voluntary repatriation in safety and in dignity. The importance of return was highlighted as an “optimum solution, with one delegation emphasizing that refugees have a major role to play in rebuilding their homeland.

[Organizational reform]

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Many of you welcomed UNHCR’s internal reform process, including decentralization and regionalization, which you deemed necessary and timely to adapt to the new ways of working. In this regard, you supported the alignment of UNHCR’s efforts with the broader United Nations transformation, particularly in relation to the repositioning of the United Nations development system. Above all, you supported moving decision-making and support functions closer to the persons of concern to UNHCR. As the Deputy Secretary-General said, “while we are dealing with changing processes and mechanisms, we must never lose sight of the end goal of our reforms: achieving better results and impact on people’s lives on the ground.”

The impact of the decentralized model on UNHCR’s ability to strengthen partnerships, including with local actors, was also highlighted. As one delegation noted, decentralization and regionalization should not replace localization. In this regard, a lot remained to be done to strengthen partnerships with national and local actors. UNHCR was also encouraged to continue to invest in new partnerships and strengthen cooperation with other United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to increase impact and effectiveness.

You also expressed appreciation for UNHC’s proactive stance on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as sexual harassment. And you encouraged UNHCR to continue its policy of zero tolerance on this issue.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In his opening statement, the High Commissioner presented six key displacement-related challenges and added a notable seventh – the climate emergency. And, like the High Commissioner, many of you stressed that this is becoming a key driver of both internal displacement and movements across borders. In this context, there was a strong call for an environmental protection strategy to curb this growing problem. You also urged UNHCR to integrate environmental and climate-related considerations into its humanitarian response, taking into consideration sources of renewable energy.

We heard a powerful statement from one country in a region heavily impacted by this phenomenon. “Climate change is real. It affects all of us – the greenhouse emitters and the non-emitters, the developed and the developing worlds.” We were reminded that now is the time to act and to prevent displacement as a result of climate change.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation for your constructive comments and the tangible suggestions put forth to address the challenges before us. Remember that today – collectively – we have the power to make a real difference in the lives of refugees, the internally displaced and stateless people. Should we give up? Absolutely NO – this is not an option. With this in mind, I would like to end with a quote by the Deputy Secretary-General, which perfectly summarizes the key takeaway from our discussion this week: “Let us work together and leave no one behind on our journey to peace, prosperity, dignity and opportunity for all.”

Thank you.