

Global Refugee Forum – ILO Plenary Statement

To Be Delivered by Regional Director, ADG, Ms Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon

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(3 minutes)

Excellencies, High-Commissioner, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As 2019 marked ILO's centenary year, it seems fitting to recall that, from its very beginning, the ILO was actively involved in helping refugees access decent jobs and to prevent their exploitation in the workplace in the aftermath of World War I. In fact, the ILO constitution of 1919 calls specifically on ILO for "*the protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own.*"

One hundred years on, paying special attention to refugees' rights as workers remains just as critical. With refugee crises lasting increasingly longer, it is often vital that refugees seek employment and livelihoods so that they may provide for themselves and their families. For protracted situations, finding decent work can also bring refugees dignity and purpose.

Yet, many of the same countries and communities that have welcomed refugees are struggling with their own labour market challenges, including high unemployment. Without proper support early on, the repercussions can be far-reaching for both refugees and national workers, not only on wages and working conditions, but ultimately on peace and social cohesion.

The challenges posed by forced displacement cannot be left to host countries alone – the stakes are simply too high. The international community can provide much help through equipping those at the forefront of crisis response with the means to improve their own lives and working conditions and those of refugees and others displaced by violence, natural disaster or climate change.

ILO is fully committed to playing its role. We pledge to intensify our cooperation with sister UN agencies, and to scale up our technical support to governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other partners to facilitate decent work opportunities for workers in hosting communities and refugees, including women and youth affected by crisis.

We are committed to accelerating our existing efforts within the Horn of Africa, Middle East, Sahel, Latin America and elsewhere to assist governments in adopting the appropriate mix of labour market policies and interventions. These include workplace protections, market-driven skills development, enabling environments for entrepreneurship and business growth, strengthened data and institutional services for workers, and equitable access to social protection schemes. And we will foster social dialogue in these processes as an effective means to ensure lasting and durable solutions.

Thank you.