

U.S. Delegation Statement
Agenda Item 4a. Protection
Delivered by Humanitarian Affairs Counselor Daniel McNicholas
72nd Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee
October 7, 2021

- Thank you, Vice Chair, Assistant High Commissioner Triggs, and Director of International Protection O’Hara. Over the past year, the protection challenges that UNHCR and Member States have faced have been the most daunting in decades. The unceasing growth in the numbers of forcibly displaced persons around the world, the unabating and increasing conflicts, the accelerating impacts of climate change, and the global COVID-19 pandemic are compounding protection risks in ways we never anticipated. Few Member States are unaffected. Amidst these formidable challenges, UNHCR’s protection mandate continues to prove its value and relevance. The task for all of us is to learn from these challenges and strengthen our protection efforts.
- The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated protection risks for many of UNHCR’s populations of concern as travel restrictions, rising xenophobia, school closures, and loss of livelihoods resulted in increased needs for prevention and response to gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, education, and other protection efforts. The United States has supported these efforts through our funding to UNHCR and other international and non-governmental organizations as well as our support to COVAX and its Humanitarian Buffer.
- The United States would like to use this opportunity to reiterate that sanctions can be an appropriate, effective, and legitimate means of achieving foreign policy goals and that U.S. sanctions are consistent with international law and in line with the Charter of the United Nations. The United States is not alone in that view or practice, as evidenced by broad coordination with allies and partners on sanctions in multilateral fora.
- The United States imposes sanctions to promote accountability for serious human rights abuses and to impose financial consequences on officials who threaten the stability of international political and economic systems.
- The United States is a longstanding champion of protection against gender-based violence, and we commend UNHCR’s progress in this area with

funding from the Safe from the Start initiative. Knowing that gender-based violence is exacerbated in situations of displacement and conflict, the United States has invested significantly in efforts to prepare humanitarian partners to prevent and mitigate GBV risks from the start of a crisis. UNHCR's GBV Policy Monitoring Framework, deployment of GBV experts in the vast majority of L3 emergencies, widespread staff training on GBV, and efforts to mainstream GBV into internal budget decisions all demonstrate the agency's serious commitment to address gender-based violence.

- In these efforts, it is especially important that refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and stateless persons who face persecution and other risks based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity have equal access to protection, assistance, and solutions. President Biden's Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World made clear that the U.S. comprehensive international human rights agenda includes the elimination of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Across the world, LGBTQI+ persons are threatened, tortured, and killed for their sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, or because they may not conform to dominant social and cultural norms. LGBTQI+ persons continue to face serious threats at home and in countries of asylum, where they may be isolated and fearful of seeking help. In response, the President has called for expanding resettlement solutions for LGBTQI+ persons and ensuring the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program operates in an efficient and dignified manner for all. While LGBTQI+ individuals are already prioritized for referrals to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, we are working with partners to expand access for eligible LGBTQI+ refugees, including through greater use of NGO referrals and a private sponsorship pilot program. However, we can and must be doing more to support LGBTQI+ individuals, and we urge UNHCR and Member States to join us in proactively advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons and ensuring their equal access to protection, assistance, and solutions.
- In working to address climate-related displacement, UNHCR has developed a "Strategic framework for climate action" and issued legal considerations on asylum claims made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters. Bold action to tackle the climate crisis is more urgent than ever. President Biden directed U.S. federal agencies to develop a report on climate change and its impact on migration, including forced migration, internal displacement, and planned relocation. This report is to consider

options for protection and resettlement of individuals displaced directly or indirectly from climate change, among other issues. We look forward to discussing this report with UNHCR and others, and encourage Member States to cooperate to address the protection needs of displaced and stateless populations in the context of climate change.

- Before closing, we note that the United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia's unprecedented action to expel the leadership of the United Nations organizations involved in ongoing humanitarian operations. We continue to call on all actors to ensure that life-saving aid reaches people who need it most - regardless of ethnicity - and remind all parties of their obligation to protect refugees and IDPs and to allow unhindered access for humanitarian workers.
- Finally, in this 70th anniversary year of the Refugee Convention, the United States recognizes, as UNHCR does in its Note on international protection, the enduring importance of respect for the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. We urge all countries to follow this cardinal principle of protection. As we work to rebuild our own humanitarian protection system, the United States remains committed to advancing safe, orderly, and humane migration policies in our own country and abroad. In these times of challenge and stress, our work to put protection at the center of policy and programming continues with urgency.