



# World Refugee Day

Tel Aviv, 20 June 2019

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1. I am so pleased to see so many of our refugee partners and supporters, colleagues, friends, humanitarian workers all in one place. [World Refugee Day](#) provides indeed a very unique opportunity for all of us to meet, mingle and celebrate our diversity. On behalf UNHCR - the United Nations Refugee Agency - it is therefore my great pleasure to welcome you all to this [Solidarity Festival](#) organized in commemoration of World Refugee Day.
2. I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo and the Police for the support they have extended to us, including the safe use of this beautiful landmark of the city. The Habima Square indeed adds a great luster to our festival. We are very much thankful too to the artists who have agreed to share with us this evening their musical talents, poetry and fashion. And let me say how grateful we are to Helen and Ali for agreeing to be our Mistress and Master of Ceremonies. You are doing beautifully! Please join me in a round of applause for Helen and Ali.
3. Refugees are a symbol of our turbulent times. They bring home to us in the most visceral and compelling way what is happening in the world - war, conflict, persecution, extremism, anarchic disorder and egregious human rights abuses forcing people out of their homes, communities and countries. Every day, thousands of men, women and children have to make one of the most difficult decisions in life - to leave behind all that is dear to them and walk away to an uncertain and often frightening future elsewhere because they have no other choice.
4. The refugee experience is a story of loss and suffering. It is a story of family separation, uprooting, deprivation and trauma. Many of them have seen their homes destroyed, members of their family killed, or tortured, their communities bombarded. Children make up half of the world's refugees and they bear a disproportionate burden of the suffering.
5. But the refugee journey is also a story of courage and resilience. It takes real courage to be a refugee. Courage not to give up hope, and to make the most of the hand that has been dealt. Courage not only to survive, but to persevere and build a new future against the odds, eventually to become contributing and enriching members of society once more. Refugees deserve our respect, understanding and support so that they can nurture and realize their hopes.

6. What we are celebrating today, as every year on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, is thus the indomitable spirit and courage of these ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. World Refugee Day is also an opportunity to pay tribute to the communities that welcome them and the many humanitarians working for their protection and well-being.
7. This is a time where refugees need us more than ever. It is our responsibility as political leaders, as NGOs, as faith leaders, as trade unions, as teachers, as journalists, as members of the legal community, as concerned citizens to give voice to the voiceless as we seek to empower the victims of conflict and abuse and ensure their protection. Beyond the international legal obligations countries have, protection is also a core principal found across all major religions. It lies at the heart of our very humanity: to embrace, respect and care for others, especially those in danger. As such it is our shared and collective responsibility to each do our part to welcome and show care for the stranger among us.
8. On this World Refugee Day, therefore, let us join together in global solidarity with refugees, the greatest embodiment of the human survivor spirit. Let us stand with them, and ensure they do not become again victims of intolerance and hate. Let us adjust our own fears and preconceptions, and be able to view refugees as equal fellow human beings, and each do our part to ensure they have the opportunities to engage fully in all aspects of community life. In doing so, we demonstrate that we stand for inclusion, respect, tolerance and diversity - the principles upon which a truly democratic society relies in order to flourish.

Thank you.