

Global Compact on Refugees

Thematic discussion five: Issues that cut across all four substantive sections of the comprehensive refugee response, and overarching issues

15 November 2017

Austrian intervention

Panel One: How can we address the root causes of large movements of refugees?

Thank you Chairperson.

We thank UNHCR for its precious work in implementing the New York Declaration on Migrants and Refugees. We would like to reiterate our strong support for the roadmap and process towards a global compact on refugees.

Addressing the root causes of large movement of refugees is key and I thank all panellists for their pertinent contributions. Let me specially highlight the presentation by Handicap International on the link between the use of explosive weapons in urban areas and displacement. Your data on the reasons why Syrian refugees had to leave their homes is startling. It shows to what large extent displacement is caused by the destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and other buildings.

It is an inconvenient truth that today's wars and conflicts are fought in cities and other urban areas. Explosive weapons used in such areas overwhelmingly kill and injure civilians rather than combatants. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, more than 90 per cent of the victims are civilians. In addition, infrastructure damage to hospitals, schools or to electricity and water grids causes additional deaths and diseases; affected communities are often left with no other choice than fleeing their home cities and villages.

We need to do more in order to restrain this major root cause of destruction. Austria together with other states, UN OCHA, the ICRC and several NGOs strives to reduce the human suffering caused by explosive weapons in populated areas. Less suffering and destruction of vital infrastructure would significantly reduce displacement. We are grateful that this root cause has been addressed today and look forward to elaborate further on this during the future work on the Global Compact on Refugees.

Thank you.