

UNHCR Executive Committee

Geneva, 5–9 October 2020

G e n e r a l d e b a t e

Statement by

Ambassador Robert MÜLLER

*Deputy Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations
and other International Organisations in Geneva*

C H E C K A G A I N S T D E L I V E R Y

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

At the outset, let me congratulate UNHCR on the 70th anniversary of its foundation and express Austria's most sincere appreciation and gratitude to all UNHCR staff in the field and at headquarters for their relentless dedication and hard work in often difficult and dangerous operating environments. I equally want to thank High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and Deputy High Commissioner Kelly Clements for their excellent leadership.

Austria aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Mr. Chair,

We are deeply troubled by the fatal consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees, IDPs and other persons of concern to UNHCR as well as on their host communities. The pandemic has created an unprecedented additional challenge for the populations already affected by humani-

tarian crises. Austria highly appreciates that the health crisis has not weakened UNHCR's determination to "stay and deliver" nor its commitment to seeking protection and solutions, including for stateless persons. We commend UNHCR for its immediate establishment of special programmes in response to COVID-19, which are aimed at protecting the most vulnerable groups. Austria welcomes and fully supports the leadership of the United Nations system in the global response to COVID-19: The outbreak of the virus, its spread around the globe and its consequences on all areas of human life have proven that this crisis can only be addressed by a coordinated and coherent multilateral response, at global as well as at regional level, where the United Nations work and act "as one". This health emergency has also demonstrated the importance of the Global Compact on Refugees, including the commitment to international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing.

At the same time, we are gravely concerned about the continuously sharply rising numbers of forcibly displaced people, which have nearly reached the amount of 80 million by now and corresponds to one percent of the entire human population. The protracted conflicts in too many countries confront their own populations and their neighbouring countries with enormous humanitarian challenges. As mentioned in this year's *Note on International Protection*, under the heading "mixed movements", "large numbers of people continue to move across international borders, irregularly and in dangerous conditions."

These prospects confirm our view that any discussion on solutions, on the global as well as on the regional level, has to take a comprehensive and holistic approach. Such an approach has to feature a considerably deepened cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination. Foremost, it has to create and foster protection, durable solutions and prospects in the regions of origin. It has to include measures to prevent and combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking in order to ensure that those in need can actually benefit from international protection. While fully upholding our obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and guaranteeing full respect for, protection and fulfilment of all human rights of asylum seekers and refugees throughout their asylum procedures and stay, we also have to envisage a credible system of return of those determined not eligible for international protection. We believe that redress can be reached most effectively on the basis of the principle of flexible solidarity, which allows every state to contribute to international burden- and responsibility sharing in such areas, where it is capable to do so, and by those means, which are practicable for that state.

Mr. Chair,

Our Federal Government, which has taken up its work at the beginning of this year, has committed itself to an ambitious and comprehensive set of long-term collaboration areas with UNHCR. These include:

- cooperating with UNHCR in our advocacy, on the international level, for legal, safe and regular pathways to neighbouring states of crisis regions;
- supporting UNHCR operations in crisis regions to ensure humanitarian relief on site;
- engaging with UNHCR in the evaluation of the security situation in countries of origin of asylum seekers;
- consulting with UNHCR in the creation of an accelerated, modern and more efficient asylum procedure; and
- conducting effective quality controls through comprehensive monitoring and improvement measures in order to ensure a high quality of swift and fair asylum procedures and basic care in Austria in cooperation with UNHCR.

In the course of this year, Austria has provided one million euros to support UNHCR's operation assisting Venezuelan refugees in Colombia, more than 1.6 million euros to support the Office's Syria Program, including COVID-19 response, two million euros to support the Office's activities in Libya, also with a focus on COVID-19, and three million euros, as well as contributions in kind and deployment of relief personnel, to improve the living conditions in refugee camps in Greece. In addition, the Austrian Federal Government has decided to quadruplicate Austria's core contribution to UNHCR.

Mr. Chair,

Let me finally express Austria's strong support for UNHCR's continuous efforts to end statelessness, including the #IBelong Campaign. Austria is party to both the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and congratulates North Macedonia, who, by ratifying the latter convention at the beginning of this year, now also has become a party to both of these conventions.

Austria will continue to be a strong partner of UNHCR and stands ready to further support your organisation as the leading UN institution for refugees, IDPs and stateless persons.

Thank you very much.