

Statement by Delegation of Thailand
His Excellency Mr. Sek Wannamethee,
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand
to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva,
at the General Debate, 71st Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee,
Wednesday 7 October 2020, Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations
(5 minutes)

Mr. Chairperson,
High Commissioner,
Distinguished Delegates,

1. On behalf of the Thai Delegation, allow me to congratulate Mr. Chairman and the Bureau on the able steering of the Executive Committee, particularly during this **challenging year**. We also commend the High Commissioner and his Office for their perseverance, dedication and commitment during this COVID-19 crisis.
2. Last December, during the first **Global Refugee Forum (GRF)**, Thailand made 8 pledges. We focused on the protracted situation of the Myanmar Displaced Persons in Thailand, and, more specifically, on the establishment of a National Screening Mechanism and alternatives to detention measures. I would like to take the opportunity today to update the progress of our work.
3. First, through a **joint bilateral mechanism** between the Governments of Thailand and Myanmar, we have successfully returned to Myanmar in a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable manner over 1,000 persons within the past few years. Earlier this year, through the support of the UNHCR, representatives from Myanmar agencies visited 3 temporary shelters in Tak province. The visit helped boost the confidence of the displaced persons to join the repatriation programme.
4. At present, over 80,000 Myanmar displaced persons remain and scheduled returns for this year have had to be postponed due to the pandemic. But our efforts have not waned. To meet **immediate concerns**, relevant agencies have coordinated to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the temporary shelters. The provincial public health agencies have been key in carrying out regular screening, awareness raising on prevention methods and establishing separate quarantine quarters as well as an SOP in the case that COVID cases are discovered. We are gratified that there have been no report of COVID-19 cases thus far within the shelters. To meet **longer term interests**, we have continued to work on the development of livelihood skills and vocational

training for the displaced persons in achieving self-reliant and sustainable livelihoods on their return to Myanmar.

5. Second, on 22 June 2020, the **Regulation on a National Screening Mechanism (NSM)** for Thailand entered into force. We thank the UNHCR for playing a vital role throughout our efforts to establish the Screening Mechanism, in particular capacity-building for relevant officials.

6. The Regulation on the National Screening Mechanism is the first of its kind in Thailand to also directly address the issue of **persons in need of protection in urban areas**. Under this Regulation, a “protected person” shall not be repatriated to the country of origin, except in the case that such person voluntarily intends to leave. The Regulation also stipulates that protected persons will be provided the necessary social services such as education in the case of children and healthcare services.

7. Third, an MoU on **Alternatives to Detention for Migrant Children** was signed in January 2019. It gave effect to a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and a manual containing guidelines for implementation. They reiterate the joint efforts of the Thai Government to remove migrant children and their mothers from the Immigration Detention Centers. Last year, the Immigration Bureau finished construction of its Mother and Child Admission Centres which have since been reception places for mothers and their children during the case management process before being transferred to shelters for children and families under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS).

Mr. Chairperson,

8. The **statelessness** issue remains high on our agenda. One of our priorities is to legalize their stay and ensure all stateless persons are registered in order to facilitate access to health services, formalization of employment, as well as the process for granting nationality when applicable. Moreover, since the adoption of a Cabinet Resolution on 7 December 2016 that provided nationalization pathways for stateless persons born in Thailand, an increased number of stateless persons have qualified to apply for Thai nationality. As of August this year, 39,162 stateless persons have been granted Thai nationality. Despite the pandemic and strict social distancing measures, we continue to tackle the remaining challenges and push through with the 7 pledges made during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness last October.

9. Thailand also continues its role to contribute to finding durable solutions to the situation of displaced persons from **Rakhine State**. In line with the **ASEAN Preliminary Needs Assessment recommendations**, Thailand is supporting the implementation of three priority projects; namely, the provision of biometric machines at reception and transit centres, the provision of agricultural equipment, and the renovation of fish and shrimp ponds in Rakhine state.

Mr. Chairperson,

10. Huge challenges remain, particularly the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 on refugees and their host communities. We join the call for **greater burden- and responsibility-sharing with host countries** and stand ready to continue our constructive cooperation with the UNHCR and all partners to find durable solutions and meet the protection needs of these people.

I thank you.

(797 words)