

71st UNHCR Executive Committee

Palais des Nations, Geneva

Statement by H.E Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney

Monday, 5th October 2020

DRAFT STATEMENT

Thank you Chair,

High Commissioner,

I am pleased to speak to you from Ireland today, as we mark the 70th anniversary of UNHCR, the undoubted leader in our global response to situations of displacement. That several UNHCR staff-members have lost their lives to COVID-19, while working with families who have lost their homes and livelihoods, is testament to the extraordinary challenges facing humanitarians in 2020. It is a reminder that we, collectively, must continue to support your work assisting people in the most vulnerable of situations. I would like to express Ireland's condolences on the loss of your colleagues.

COVID-19 has had a massive impact on all of our countries and on the global economy. This cannot be used as an excuse not be generous - we must respond to the deeply unequal effects of the pandemic

Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR are among the most vulnerable to the pandemic, experiencing immediate health effects, the socio-economic repercussions and barriers to education that have kept millions of young people out of school. We have a responsibility to respond to their needs.

Among displaced persons, the gendered impacts of COVID-19 go further, with women and girls often experiencing consequences that are harsher still. This is why Ireland provided €3 million in additional un-earmarked support to UNHCR's COVID-19 response in April. Our financial support to UNHCR is now at its highest level in more than a decade, driven by our confidence in UNHCR as the international community faces the ever-rising needs of the displaced.

Chair

The recent fire in the Moria Camp in Greece highlighted the terrible plight of those who are displaced. Ireland is determined to play our part in the response. Up to 50 people in family groups, will be resettled to Ireland from the camp under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. They will be given every support to rebuild their lives in peace and safety. This is in addition to the commitment we made at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva to resettle 2,900 refugees to Ireland over the next four years

We also committed to the roll-out of our national Community Sponsorship scheme. Community Sponsorship Ireland invites families, communities and social partnerships to come together in solidarity with refugees and host countries affected by mass displacement worldwide. The scheme is an innovative way to involve the Irish people in our collective efforts of burden and responsibility sharing. Ireland has been pleased to advise many of our EU and other international partners on the progress we have made on this

increasingly important area of work. Of course, this, and our regular resettlement programme, have been hindered in 2020 due to the pandemic, but I want to reassert Ireland's continuing commitment to resettlement as a vital protection tool and an expression of solidarity.

I want also to acknowledge the extraordinary generosity of those countries hosting large numbers of refugees, despite their own development challenges.

Ireland is also pleased to co-chair with Sweden the Priority Situations Core Group, which provides a forum for all states, along with UNHCR, to discuss the response to emerging situations. As chair, we advocate a 'think global, act local' approach, which helps translate global challenges into effective responses for the displaced by local communities.

Chair

Since its establishment, UNHCR has become the global leader on issues of international protection. Defending the norms and commitments enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Conventions remains of paramount importance.

UNHCR's principled voice is a guiding light, not least throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. The strong message from the High Commissioner about the inclusion of refugees and displaced persons in every aspect of our response is both commendable and pragmatic. It is not a new message, but perhaps we understand it better in the

midst of a global public health crisis: no-one is safe, until everyone is safe.

Chair,

Ireland is honoured to have been elected to the UN Security Council for a two-year term starting in January 2021. In that role, we will focus on Building Peace, Strengthening Prevention and Ensuring Accountability – areas of vital importance for displaced persons and the crises which have driven their movement.

UNHCR is playing a leading role on these issues in places such as South Sudan, and in response to the Rohingya and Venezuela crises. The root causes of displacement are deeply interconnected, including armed conflict, political instability, violation of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, and the worsening effects of climate change. I am determined Ireland will be an engaged and principled actor on these issues on the Security Council.

Let me conclude by expressing our appreciation to the staff of UNHCR who continue to champion the protection of displaced persons in the most vulnerable of situations. Humanitarian workers embody the best of human endeavour. Ireland will always be a staunch advocate of your work.

Thank you.