



**Statement by the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of South Africa, Ms Fatima Chohan, MP, during the occasion of the General Debate at the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, Switzerland, in October 2018.**

Chairperson,  
Your Excellency, the High Commissioner,  
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Aligning with the statement made by the Honourable Minister of Uganda on behalf of the African Group, let me extend our thanks to the High Commissioner for his opening remarks.

We agree that global solidarity is required for victims of wars and violent confrontations.

We agree that the rescue at sea regardless of consideration of race or nationality must be restored if we are to restore our common humanity.

We welcome the UNHCR's reforms on better governance, decentralization of regional directorates, and vigilance on eradicating abuses.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu promotes the perspective that assumes that humanity in its diversity is a single entity, hence the saying:

**I am what I am, because of who we all are.**

South Africa's anti-apartheid icon and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the philosophy as "the essence of being human".

He explains that it means that: “my humanity is inextricably bound to others. I am human because I belong to all of humanity. It speaks to our wholeness - our oneness. This philosophy requires compassion as the essence of being human. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have the self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole.”

Considering this approach, it is a huge indictment on all of humanity that there are more displaced human beings now, than ever before in modern history.

We pledge solidarity with the whole of the displaced peoples of the world, in particular the five million displaced Syrian people, and the masses of Rohingya people who have been fleeing violence directed at them over a protracted period. The more than 3 million Sudanese and Yemeni who are victims of war and have faced uninvited violence.

In our time, we are tasked with bringing greater social and economic justice, a more equitable trade dispensation to all parts of the globe, an end to wars of aggression, this cannot but be guided by the values of Ubuntu.

We require more engagements aimed at peaceful co-existence and must promote inclusion, multilateralism within a common humanity. In particular we welcome the growing peace efforts between the countries comprising the Horn of Africa. These efforts display leadership of the best kind.

South Africa is currently host to over 126,000 refugees. In 2017 a further 2,267 persons were granted refugee status. Since 1998 South Africa has granted permanent residence status to 6,676 refugees, all of whom have the opportunity to obtain full citizenship. In 2017, 508 refugees were granted permanent residency.

South Africa received over 1 million asylum seekers over a period of eight years between 2007 and 2015, amongst the largest numbers in the world.

Madam Chairperson, South Africa, does not run detention centers for those wishing to apply for asylum.

Persons applying for asylum and refugees are accorded a range of rights, including freedom of movement and access to health care, education and skills.

Uniquely, we understand, applicants for refugee status are afforded the right to work, while awaiting the finalisation of their applications.

Uniquely, many asylum seekers, whose status remains to be determined, engage in informal business activities, which in turn fuels social conflicts.

South Africa has invested much of its resources into enhancing efficiencies in processing large numbers of asylum seekers.

In a world first, we have introduced Automated Booking Terminals to enable self - service, at the Desmond Tutu Refugee Centre in Pretoria, which consistently receives more than 65 per cent of all applications for asylum.

Many aspects of the New York Declaration in regard to refugees, have already been adopted by SA. We have noted the consultations of the UNHCR in this regard.

My delegation wishes to underscore the importance of ensuring that the “development resources” to communities and refugees, must be in addition to “regular” development assistance.

We further note the important role played by the World Bank in the future plans of the UNHCR, we are indeed moved by the goodwill expressed by Madam Georgiva, earlier in this session - our hope is that no effort will be spared to ensure that there is oversight in regard to funds disbursed by the World Bank, so that there is assurance that the funds so disbursed will benefit displaced communities, further we trust these initiatives do not add to the debt-burden of host countries.

Madam Chairperson, we assure the UNHCR that SA stands ready to take up the challenge of dealing with displaced persons guided by the values of Ubuntu.

I thank you for your kind consideration.