

**Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's
Programme (75th Meeting), 18 – 20 June 2018**

Presentation of Conference Room Paper - Solutions

Introductory remarks by DRS Director (a.i.) Ewen Macleod

Mr Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to follow up on the remarks made by the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection [earlier today/ yesterday afternoon], and to introduce the Conference Room Paper on "*Solutions*". This paper provides an update on developments in UNHCR's approach to resilience and our efforts in support of solutions over the past year.

Let me begin, however, by reflecting first on what current statistics tell us about the global trends of forced displacement and offering some broad perspectives on how we should interpret them. On the surface, the assessment is a disturbing one; the numbers for all main groups – refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people - continue to climb as they have done consistently over the last six years to reach an estimated total of around 71 million. In purely statistical terms these numbers are almost inconsequential, accounting for just over 1% of the global population. Quantitatively, they should be eminently manageable. But they are the tip of a rather larger set of problems.

These are symptomatic of two worrying trends that carry considerable implications for our collective pursuit of solutions. Firstly, the persistence of internal displacement in the states from which the majority of refugees and asylum seekers have fled. Secondly, the accumulation of extreme poverty in states where fragility, conflict and violence are the principal drivers of population displacement. These developments currently affect some 1.5 billion people living in - or adjacent to - countries experiencing violent conflict.

The rise in internal displacement has been coincident with a shift in the nature of conflict; from wars fought principally between states to violence within states, often perpetrated not by formally constituted armies but by armed militia, non-state armed groups and criminal networks. These types of conflict have increased considerably over the last 30 years. In 2018, conflict and violence displaced over 41 million persons in 55 countries across the world, three quarters of that figure living in just ten (10) countries. All of these same countries either

generate or host refugees and IDPs - and sometimes both populations. And they add to the difficulties contemporary diplomacy faces in ending conflicts where there are no longer front lines – military or ideological - and where the political motives of the protagonists remain ill-defined.

By 2030, it may be expected that the encouraging trends in human health, wealth and poverty reduction recorded over the last two decades will continue. Sadly, this extraordinary progress will be uneven. In assessing “who”, “why” and “how far” certain populations may be left behind, it is widely expected that extreme poverty and marginalisation will increasingly be concentrated in those countries most affected by conflict and violence. Half the world’s poorest people will be found in circumstances where the state is unable to provide core functions, where legitimate economic activity has regressed and basic service delivery has often collapsed. These are the most salient features of situations currently generating the majority of global forced displacement.

The complex mix of factors that drive instability, exclusion and poverty largely explain why so many refugee situations remain protracted. A statistic in wide circulation suggested that the average period of exile for refugees is seventeen years (17). In recent years that figure has declined to around 4 years. Yet such a seemingly positive trend masks two important insights. Firstly, that the reduction is largely due to the increase in overall refugee figures that has brought down the average duration of exile since 2015. Secondly, that due to the persistent inability to end contemporary conflict and violence, the numbers of those in exile for over five years will likely grow in the years to come and lengthen the average period again.

These trends have important implications for our work on and approach to solutions. Self-evidently, the failure to bring peace and stability in countries from where refugees originate is the principal obstacle to ending protracted displacement. It has implications for the critical task of rebuilding trust between citizens and their government, of installing the confidence that business and enterprise need to generate sustained growth, and of restoring normal social conditions and economic systems distorted by conflict.

Given these challenges, it should come as no surprise that many refugees and internally displaced persons – particularly women and children who constitute the largest demographic - hesitate to return home. This is a familiar response, one that we have witnessed in many refugee situations, particularly in those where repeated cycles of displacement occur. Indeed, the numbers of those voluntarily returning to their homes – 593,800 in 2018 or 3% of the global

refugee population under UNHCR's mandate - testify to continuing concerns and perceptions about the sustainability of return.

In the face of these trends it would be easy to be discouraged. Easy - but misplaced. For, as ever, statistical trends do not capture the whole picture. Protractedness does not imply paralysis. And, whilst as a humanitarian and protection agency, UNHCR's mandate and capacity for resolving the larger political and security problematics that underpin forced displacement is necessarily modest, we remain actively engaged and ever alert to advancing opportunities for solutions, especially those pursued by refugees themselves.

Indeed, we are seeing positive momentum in the progressive steps being taken by a wide array of stakeholders. We believe these can ultimately help the achievement of solutions. In that context, the affirmation of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018, represents a substantive opportunity to strengthen and broaden partnerships that are improving our work on resilience and solutions.

Available evidence suggests that policy measures enabling inclusion, self-reliance and resilience and promoting investment in human capital development result in positive outcomes for local economies and for the welfare of refugee households. This potentially lessens the fiscal and other costs related to the protection and hosting of refugees and reduces aid dependency. As importantly, UNHCR's experience indicates that refugees that acquire assets, capital, skills and knowledge during their period in exile, are much better equipped to sustain their return and reintegration and contribute not only to local economic and social recovery in their home country but often to deepen and retain important commercial links to their place of exile.

The positive outcomes for solutions through strengthened resilience can be realised through enabling policies and laws, inclusive institutional practices and programming, broader partnerships, and innovative projects. Let me reference some examples of work that has been taking place over the last twelve months.

[Enabling laws and policy changes]

There have been encouraging legal and policy developments in countries that adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), guaranteeing the rights of refugees and expanding refugee access to national systems and services. In some countries, this has

covered health, education and employment, as well as access to civil documentation, with notable progress also in areas such as freedom of movement and encampment. Ethiopia's recently promulgated new refugee law allows refugees to obtain work permits, access primary education, and national financial services and expands opportunities for local integration. Uganda is continuing to pursue its progressive refugee policy allowing refugees to farm, work and move freely, and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR on integrated health care services for refugees and host populations in the country.

[Inclusion in national systems]

Some countries have made notable efforts to expand the inclusion of refugees into **national health systems**, including through health insurance schemes and other forms of social protection.¹ Throughout the past year, we have seen dedication and commitment from a wide range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to include refugee children and youth systematically in **education and training systems** and offer technical and financial assistance for systemic improvements to education in refugee hosting countries². This support is vital, as states continue to struggle with over-stretched education systems, leading to overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms. With our partners, UNHCR is continuing efforts to also **promote employment opportunities and economic inclusion** for refugees as well as fostering economic development in host countries.

Last year UNHCR convened a global coalition entitled "Partnership for Economic Inclusion" with the goal of alleviating poverty for 500,000 refugees and host community households in 32 countries over five years. **On financial inclusion**, we are seeing more opportunities for refugees to be able to open bank accounts, access credit and generate savings. With convenient and simplified banking providing services including savings, group lending, and training courses on financial literacy and business skills, banking services can provide transformative opportunities for refugees to open new doors to education, work and quality of life.

¹ Including Rwanda, Cameroon, Chad, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Kenya, Sudan

² e.g. at the

1) **Global Education Meeting in Brussels** in December 2018,

2) **The Pan African High Level Conference on Education** reaffirmed commitments to 'making our educational systems more responsive, flexible and resilient to include refugees and internally displaced people';

3) **The [Dubai Roadmap for Education 2030 in the Arab Region \(2017-2018\)](#)**, wherein a wide range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders note their dedication 'to the inclusion of refugee children and youth systematically in national educational planning processes in order to monitor their participation and educational attainment';

4) The **[Strasbourg Declaration in November 2018](#)** committed to taking further legal and policy measures in Europe and North America to make education systems more equitable and inclusive of migrants, refugees, displaced persons, stateless children and asylum seekers.

Through strengthened cooperation with development partners including the UNDP, ILO and other organisations, including multilateral development banks and financial institutions, the socio-economic vulnerabilities and protection concerns of refugees are being addressed more systematically through more equitable development interventions benefiting displaced populations and host communities.

The partnership between the World Bank Group (WBG) and UNHCR has prospered through close cooperation on policy dialogue, programme design, data, evidence and analytics, Leveraging our respective comparative advantages contributes to broader efforts to promote and operationalize a more inclusive development approach to refugee-hosting areas, supporting commitments by host governments to enact policy change and address the social and economic dimensions of refugee displacement. This has been given practical expression through numerous joint missions and the growing deployment of full time experts to field duty stations.

Particular emphasis is put on protracted situations where dedicated WB financing mechanism, namely the IDA 18 sub-window for host and refugee communities (in 14 refugee hosting countries in Africa and Asia) and the Global Concessional Financing Facility (covering Lebanon, Jordan and Colombia), are being implemented with the active involvement of UNHCR. Complementing this effort on the analytical side, the WB-UNHCR Joint Data Centre for Forced Displacement, established with generous support from the Government of Denmark, will be fully operational in September this year.

[Innovation and creativity]

Mention should also be made of innovation and creativity that has enabled access for the forcibly displaced to opportunities for their development. Innovative partners such as Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) and Kepler have provided competency-based and blended university degree programmes in Rwanda. By leveraging Rwandan-based talent and artificial intelligence, the university aims to reduce programme costs by 60% through the establishment of an assessment centre based in Kigali. This effort not only increases local employment opportunities but also anticipates reducing costs and leveraging these savings to offer additional free tertiary opportunities for refugees. The work started in Rwanda is now being expanded to include Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Lebanon.

Durable Solutions

For the record, let me outline where we are on the formal durable solutions starting with voluntary repatriation.

[Voluntary Repatriation]

A total of 593,814 refugees returned to their countries of origin in 2018, slightly less than in 2017. Some voluntarily repatriated in operations formally supported by UNHCR and partners; a significant number of returns also took place in a self-organised manner with refugees exercising their right to choose this solution of their own accord.

In 2018, challenges faced by returning refugees included many perennial issues – insecurity in areas of return, access to essential services, difficulties obtaining civil documentation; destroyed or occupied housing, land and property; and a lack of livelihoods and work opportunities.

To address such obstacles and respond to the longer-term needs of returnees requires collaborative efforts from different stakeholders. UNHCR has increasingly engaged in partnerships with development actors, national, and municipal authorities and advocated for the inclusion of returnees into national development plans and long-term development projects.

We are witnessing more engagement from development stakeholders on this, and we hope that in the context of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, concrete commitments will be made by UN and other organizational development actors, and bilateral development donors to target returnees and hosting communities, and areas of return, in their support to national and sub-regional development planning processes.

[Local Integration and local solutions]

With regard to local integration and other local solutions, in the past year we have seen notable efforts by some states to locally integrate refugees and to pursue alternatives to camps approaches.³ We are seeing an intensified focus from networks of cities, municipalities and civil society on holistic approaches to integration and inclusion. At the regional level, the Abuja

³ For example, in the Americas, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador and El Salvador established procedures for refugees to convert their temporary migratory status into permanent residence, and in West Africa, states including the Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Liberia are taking steps to facilitate permanent residence and naturalisation.

Action Statement highlighted the need for proactive approaches to local integration and alternatives to camps; and the priority actions of the national chapters of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework ('MIRPS') in Mexico and Central America, included initiatives to enhance local integration.

In support of states that have elected to locally integrate refugees or to provide other local solutions entailing interim legal stay, but who require material, financial or technical assistance, we hope that commitments will be made to those processes in the context of the Global Refugee Forum.

[Resettlement and Complementary Pathways]

Some 55,700 refugees departed to resettlement countries in 2018, with the largest number having been referred by UNHCR from major refugee-hosting countries, including Lebanon^[1] Turkey^[2] Jordan ^[3] Uganda^[4] and the United Republic of Tanzania^[5]. Recognizing the critical importance of resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, UNHCR has been working with States and partners to develop the three-year strategy called for in the Global Compact on Refugees, with a view to increasing the pool of resettlement places, encouraging more countries to participate in resettlement, and improving access to and expanding complementary pathways for the admission of refugees.

In summary, whilst current global trends in relation to refugee displacement can occasionally appear daunting, UNHCR is exploring new and promising opportunities to advance resilience and solutions for refugees and other displaced populations with our partners.

We are encouraged by the strong engagement of host and donor countries in and support for the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees at a time when multilateral initiatives are in short supply. We are also motivated by the growing engagement of other constituencies - notably development partners and the private sector – in addressing issues of forced displacement. We are confident that these collective efforts will result in measurable improvements in the resilience and solutions to the many challenges faced by refugees in the years to come.

^[1] 9,800

^[2] 9,000

^[3] 5,100

^[4] 4,000

^[5] 3,400

In outlining these initiatives and the challenges we face, I am mindful of the words of the late President Nelson Mandela of South Africa:

“Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.”