

**Statement delivered by Mr. Jüri SEILENTHAL,
Director General of the Foreign Economic Policy and Development Cooperation
Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of ESTONIA**

**GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM
17 – 18 December 2019**

High Commissioner, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Estonia welcomes the first Global Refugee Forum. Estonians have been refugees, most tragically at the end of the Second World when 90.000 Estonians fled from the returning Soviet occupation. Today we are ready and willing to contribute to the alleviation of suffering of those who have been forced to leave their homes and homelands due to the devastating conflicts, persecutions or other reasons.

Unfortunately, the number of forcibly displaced persons is growing while the humanitarian space is shrinking due to the lack of compliance with international humanitarian law. In two weeks, Estonia will become **for the first time an elected member of the UN Security Council**. We take very seriously our increased responsibility and accountability globally towards people in need of international protection.

While conflicts remain the main cause for refugee situations many new triggers for forced displacement have emerged, including those related to the climate change. These new situations need also **new innovative ways of working and new partnerships**. Engaging further with the **private sector and civil society** at all levels would enable to develop durable solutions.

Mr. Chairman,

Estonia is a **stable and predictable donor** to the UNHCR. 10 days ago at the UNHCR`s Pledging Conference we announced our unremarked contribution for 2020, which had already been disbursed. Recently we have also contributed to alleviation of **Syrian** and **Rohingya** refugee situations and the IDP situation in **Ukraine**.

Estonian Government considers the Global Refugee Compact as a legally non-binding instrument, not forming a basis for international common law that helps the states to find solutions to the global refugee issues. Estonia complies with its international obligations by taking sovereign decisions. We deem all six focus areas of this Forum extremely important. We place special significance to the **education** of the refugee and internally displaced children, to avoid “lost generations”. Estonia has contributed in this regards - for example by providing ICT – skills training for the children in **Za’atar** and **Azraq** refugee camps in Jordan and **Duhok** Iraq.

Estonia believes that **digital innovative solutions** will increase the efficiency and timeliness of the response to different crises. Better and more secure identification and registration of people in need and improved access to the services saves lives. Interoperable databases, innovative identification and registration tools with reliable data protection solutions and prediction of large population movements with the help of AI could contribute to leaving no one behind. Estonia is ready to continue working together with the UNHCR for that goal.

I'm proud to announce that the **Government of Estonia pledges** to increase its cooperation with UNHCR on digital identification, including through providing increased technical support and assistance, to consider how trusted digital identities for refugees can contribute to achieving the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees. While digital innovative solutions could be applied in every 6 focus area, Estonian other two concrete pledges are related to the support for sustainable livelihoods and refugees education, including digital competency programs.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, Estonia highly appreciates the tireless efforts of humanitarian workers who risk their personal safety and security on behalf of the people in need. We will take every action also during our Security Council Membership to support humanitarian organizations, and to respect their independence and neutrality.

Thank you.