

UNHCR Executive Committee

Agenda Item 4(a): International Protection

12 October 2023

Australia thanks UNHCR for its update on international protection.

At the outset, allow me to express Australia's deep concerns about the safety and security of humanitarian workers following the news overnight that UN and Red Cross workers have been killed in Israel and Gaza. We underline the imperative of adherence to international humanitarian law and the protection of civilian lives in this and in all conflicts.

Australia values UNHCR's essential work, under increasingly challenging circumstances, including in the Asia Pacific region where humanitarian needs continue to be significant and are escalating. To this end, we thank UNHCR for putting a spotlight on the Afghanistan and Rohingya situations at the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum.

We commend Pakistan and Iran for their decades long commitment to Afghan refugees and call on them to remain global examples of refugee protection stewardship. With continued reports of human rights abuses in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, including the systematic oppression of women and girls, voluntary, sustainable repatriation in conditions of safety and dignity remains difficult.

Australia continues to stand by the Afghan people, including through the provision of humanitarian and basic needs assistance in Afghanistan and through support for Afghan refugees and neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees, including Iran and Pakistan. Since August 2021, Australia has

resettled over 13,500 Afghan citizens, consistent with our commitment to increased Afghan resettlement following the Taliban takeover.

Madam Chair

We also commend the generosity of Bangladesh and other countries in the region for hosting over a million displaced Rohingya from Myanmar. Australia's desire to see a resolution to the crisis in Myanmar remains steadfast. We use every lever at our disposal to press for a resolution of the crisis and continue to call on the military regime in Myanmar to create conditions conducive for the safe and dignified return of Rohingya. Australia supports ASEAN's leadership in seeking to de-escalate the violence, facilitate humanitarian access and support constructive dialogue.

While we wait for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return to become viable, Australia is committed to providing support for displaced Rohingya and host communities in Bangladesh. Our flexible contributions to humanitarian partners enable them to sustain life-saving assistance while responding to emerging priorities.

We stand ready to work with Bangladesh on exploring ways to build the self-reliance of Rohingya refugees. In line with the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Crisis, initiatives such as skills training and education programs will help equip refugees for life when they are able to return to Myanmar and could open opportunities for complementary pathways.

Looking ahead to the Global Refugee Forum, Australia is considering how to best build on our ongoing support to both situations, to preserve the protection space and provide access to durable solutions. As part of this, we remain committed to assisting states to establish and grow refugee

resettlement programmes, as well as innovative and sustainable complementary pathways, including labour mobility.

Madam Chair,

In closing, Australia commends UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity approach. Understanding the protection needs and capabilities of all people affected by a crisis is not just principled practice. It also helps to address the specific barriers that individuals face in realising their rights and accessing services, thereby improving the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Australia encourages all 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledges to be age, gender and diversity inclusive.

And finally, really in closing, I wish to join others in expressing our appreciation to Assistant High Commissioner Triggs for her service, not only in her current role but over a rich and distinguished career, and wish her well for her next endeavour, but not her retirement – that would be premature.

Thank you.