

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO THE VIRTUAL CLOSING OF THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM

Geneva, 15 December 2023

[As delivered]

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It's a pleasure to participate in the closing of this second Global Refugee Forum.

I congratulate High Commissioner Filippo Grandi for convening it, and I thank Switzerland for hosting.

I also recognize the thousands of participants who have come together in support of refugees — governments, development partners, the private sector, civil society and faith leaders.

And I thank the refugees here for sharing their experiences and shining a spotlight on the challenges and opportunities to support them as they rebuild their lives.

Excellencies,

During my decade as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, I had the immense privilege of witnessing first-hand the courage, resilience and perseverance of refugees.

I met countless refugees who survived dire and dangerous circumstances — seeing family and friends killed, and homes and neighbourhoods destroyed.

Many fled conflicts only to suffer discrimination, abuse and outright violence while on the move.

Others — especially women and young people, who represent the majority of refugees globally — fell into the merciless and exploitative grip of human traffickers.

But, at the same time, I saw something more.

I witnessed the enormous generosity of many host countries and communities who welcomed newcomers with great hospitality.

And let me add, these were often some of the poorest countries and communities in the world.

I saw governments bravely upholding international protection standards and providing asylum — often in the face of domestic political pressure to do otherwise.

I saw refugees lending their hands and their hearts to host countries.

Boosting economies.

Creating businesses and jobs.

And enriching the national fabric.

These experiences reinforced my belief that protecting and supporting refugees on every step of their journeys is a moral obligation, a practical necessity and an economic imperative.

Excellencies,

This Forum comes at the close of a year of intense political division, conflict and climate catastrophe.

And a year in which record numbers of people are being pushed from their homes, fleeing violence, insecurity and danger.

From the Sahel to Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen — to the DRC [The Democratic Republic of the Congo], Myanmar and Somalia — to the utter devastation we are witnessing in Gaza.

Indeed, Palestine refugees there are enduring unparalleled and unprecedented levels of suffering, and the UN system is doing its utmost to support them, particularly through your sister agency UNRWA [The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East].

These humanitarian nightmares have displaced 114 million people this year — 36 million of whom are refugees, fleeing across borders.

We must never forget:

These statistics represent people – people with dreams – people with hopes.

Women and men with skills and ideas.

Children with plans and ambitions.

People with the same rights as every member of the human family — to safety, food, water, shelter and dignity.

People who deserve every chance at a better future.

But as you have heard during this Forum, the resources to support refugees are under enormous strain — especially in the global south, which continues to host and welcome the overwhelming majority of refugees.

Protection and help for refugees should not be a lottery, or a disproportionate burden that falls on a few countries and communities based on their geographic location. It is an obligation shared by all of humanity.

We must match the generosity of host countries and communities with far greater international solidarity and support at the regional and global levels — as set out in the Global Compact for Refugees.

And we must create the conditions for peace so refugees can return safely to their homes.

Excellencies,

This Forum is helping to stem the tide of misery.

As it draws to a close, it's clear that you have taken the Forum's theme — “Action, Unity and Impact” — to heart.

During the Forum, delegates, States and various partners made pledges and commitments across priority areas — from climate action to education and employment.

These pledges and commitments are built around solutions and inclusion.

National inclusion — seen in commitments to give refugees access to education, health care, social protections and safe housing.

But also, economic inclusion — shown by the private sector partners here, who have committed to employ thousands of refugees.

And social inclusion — demonstrated by governments who have committed not only to generous financial support, but to ensure that refugees' voices are heard when decisions are made.

Excellencies,

This year's pledges and commitments breathe life into the great promise of the Global Compact on Refugees not only to support refugees, but to ease pressure on host countries and tackle the systemic issues that cause people to flee in the first place.

They also give me hope that we can forge global consensus to address, once and for all, the great challenges of our time that are fuelling the refugee crisis.

From climate breakdown, a growing cause of displacement.

To the development crisis, which is starving many countries of the resources they need to invest in social protection, health and education systems, leaving their citizens and refugees alike without ladders of opportunity.

And above all, to the crisis of peace in our world today.

We need to build much stronger political will to end conflicts, and reverse the cycle of division, destruction and denial of human rights that drives people from their homes and places tens of millions of people in harm's way.

Excellencies,

By rallying around the needs of refugees at this Forum, you are all providing a bright burst of light in what has been a dark and troubling year.

In 2024 and beyond, let's pledge to continue matching the courage and resilience of every refugee with our own steadfast commitment to help them rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

Let's meet this collective responsibility together.

Thank you.

