

**Remarks of Ms. Rema Jamous, UNHCR Regional Director for MENA**

**92<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee, 13-15 March 2025**

**Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,**

2024 was another challenging year for the Middle East and North Africa region. New conflicts forced more people to flee their homes, many for the second or third time, while protracted conflicts left millions of displaced persons at risk and spiraling further into poverty and despair. All told, over 16 million people remain forcibly displaced in the region, many facing protection risks and in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

There have also been dramatic new developments with regional implications.

Continued hostilities in Gaza brought further devastation and exacerbated regional instability. Intensified conflict in Lebanon also led to the displacement of over 1 million people inside the country and triggered the movement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians and Lebanese into Syria.

In **Syria**, 14 years of conflict ended with the fall of the former Government, offering Syrians cautious optimism and the hope of returning home and rebuilding their lives. And as these last months have shown us, many are choosing to do so despite the continued challenges and uncertainty. Similarly, over 800,000 internally displaced Syrians have also returned since December.

Triggered by Syrian refugees actively requesting assistance from UNHCR to be able to return home, we are supporting safe, dignified, and voluntary returns. We recently launched a framework for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced populations, planning for their initial reintegration and eventual

inclusion into national systems. This Framework, however, can only succeed if there is stability and peace in Syria accompanied by a substantial increase in both humanitarian and development funding.

It will operate alongside the broader plan now being finalized in Damascus by the United Nations and humanitarian partners which will be shared next week at the Brussels conference on Syria. This moment presents a historic opportunity to help end the world's largest displacement crisis – but also underscores that urgent international commitment is needed to make it sustainable.

Distinguished delegates, it must be noted that while risks related to persecution by the former Government have ceased, others may persist or become more pronounced. Events of the last week remind us that enduring peace, stability and national reconciliation will take time. In that vein, governments are urged to uphold Syrians' right to seek asylum and to maintain support for host countries which have been on the frontlines of solidarity, sheltering millions of Syrians for well over a decade.

Away from news headlines, protracted and complex crises like **Yemen** continue to deteriorate, leaving over 19.5 million people - half the country's population - in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Economic, political, and security challenges, along with restrictions on humanitarian operations, also continue, as do our efforts to serve the vulnerable population. UNHCR is the only organization responding to the protection needs of refugees in Yemen, but declining resources challenge our ability to continue doing so.

As you heard from my colleagues yesterday, the conflict in Sudan, now in its second year, continues to force many to flee, including to North Africa. **Egypt** has now become the largest country receiving Sudanese refugees adding to the substantial numbers already generously hosted in the country. Longer term, we are working

closely with the government of Egypt to support their transition to a fully government-led system following the recent adoption of a new national asylum law.

**Libya** was also one of the major host countries for Sudanese refugees while grappling with its own challenges. UNHCR is leading the inter-agency response supporting refugees in the country and continues to provide life-saving services including in detention centers and at disembarkation points.

Onward movements of refugees to and within North Africa, as well as across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, continued, particularly of Sudanese nationals. Tragically, lives continue to be lost along these routes. We have redoubled our efforts with partners and authorities to provide protection and solutions along key routes in order to mitigate against the risks and devastating consequences of these movements.

Distinguished delegates, as you have heard from all of my colleagues before me, to deliver on our mandate to protect and assist the forcibly displaced, to continue our lifesaving work across vital operations in the region, and to support host countries which have generously opened their doors to refugees, we need your support.

Notwithstanding the colossal scale of needs in our region, our budget for this year is only 11 per cent funded. This means making difficult decisions which have a direct and lasting impact on the lives of displaced men, women and children across the Middle East and North Africa. The steadfast partnership with our donors, including the United States, saves lives, stabilizes refugees, and fosters self-reliance.

Despite the difficult financial climate, our region continues to excel in innovating approaches to better serve refugees, drive progress and realize efficiencies. Our Common Cash Facility in Jordan remains a leading example, simplifying cash assistance to refugees, eliminating fraud risks and duplication, while allowing

savings to be redirected to the people we serve. Shelter for Cash is another strong example, which saves time, reduces risks and enhances autonomy by providing refugees with the means to pursue the most appropriate shelter solutions for their families. We will continue to leverage technology and creative solutions to mitigate the impact of the current funding situation and maintain our support for displaced communities to the greatest extent possible.

The road to recovery is long, but with sustained support and a coordinated effort, there is hope for a better future for the region and its people. Despite the challenges before us, we remain dedicated to helping all rebuild their lives with dignity, safety, and hope.

**Thank you.**