

**Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme (92nd meeting)  
Remarks by Raouf Mazou,  
Assistant High Commissioner for Operations  
Geneva, 11 March 2025**

**Chairperson,**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished delegates,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is an honour for me to address the ninety-second session of the Standing Committee of the EXCOM, focusing on regional activities and global programmes.

Regrettably, for the past fourteen consecutive years, the number of displaced persons worldwide has persistently increased, reaching more than 123 million by the end of 2024. This surge is a direct consequence of escalating conflicts, pervasive violence, persecution, and human rights violations, exacerbated by state fragility, poverty, and natural disasters.

In 2024, UNHCR responded to 43 emergencies across 25 countries. The most recent declaration, made last week, pertains to Burundi, where approximately 65,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo have arrived in recent weeks.

In Sudan, the ongoing conflict since April 2023 has driven 3.7 million individuals into exile, while over 8.8 million remain internally displaced, marking it the largest internal displacement crisis globally. Sadly, global turmoil coupled with the worrisome financial situation described by Kelly is being felt throughout the world. Nevertheless, it remains our duty to ensure forcibly displaced populations, and their hosts are not left alone bearing the brunt during these challenging times.

**Chairperson, distinguished delegates,**

Preserving robust emergency preparedness and response capabilities to swiftly and effectively support governments and host communities in their endeavors to protect and assist

refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is central to our mandate. This is often undertaken at great personal risk to our colleagues. As Ayaki Ito, the recently appointed Director of the Division for Emergency, Security, and Supply, will elaborate, the past year has been the deadliest for humanitarian workers, with 378 tragically losing their lives.

We must also persist in responding effectively to the ever-growing number of large, protracted refugee situations. Currently, nine countries worldwide each host more than one million refugees. Additionally, fifteen countries have more than one million of their citizens internally displaced and the average duration of displacement increases.

It has been observed that, over time, a response that is solely short-term and predominantly humanitarian, fosters dependency among refugees and creates tensions with hosts, adversely impacting the potential for durable solutions. With this in mind, and in alignment with the four objectives outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees, High Commissioner Grandi at the last EXCOM, spoke about the importance of 'sustainable programming' which we are now referring to as 'sustainable responses,' to better reflect the comprehensive nature of the concept.

Sustainable responses aim to support governments and host communities in providing protection and assistance to refugees in a manner that fosters solutions, as early as possible, including voluntary return, while promoting self-reliance for the benefit of both refugees and hosts, avoiding unnecessary dependency on humanitarian aid.

True to our commitment of engaging you, since the last EXCOM, there have been several opportunities to discuss the implementation of this approach, which focuses on operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees. I was delighted to have the opportunity on February 20th, alongside five Division Directors, to engage in dialogue with approximately 57 member states during the informal briefing on sustainable responses. In heeding to your request, we anticipate convening a second informal briefing before the June Standing Committee meeting, where a conference room paper will be presented.

Distinguished delegates,

Several countries have made definitive strides in pursuing sustainable responses by incorporating approaches into their legislation, policies, and practices which aim to:

1. avoid parallel systems in the provision of social services, such as education and healthcare, and include refugees who require continuous assistance in existing social protection schemes.
2. facilitate and capacitate refugees to contribute to the economy of their host communities through access to the job market or other livelihood opportunities,
3. transform protracted camps into settlements that are integrated into the municipalities, districts and regions in which they are located, and
4. include refugees in national identification systems which has the multiplier effect of enhancing the many facets of protection.

During the briefing, Member States emphasized the importance of ensuring:

1. adequate and predictable funding, including humanitarian aid, to address the impact of forced displacement and to ensure that sustainable responses do not equate to responsibility-shifting.
2. Voluntary repatriation, conducted under conditions of safety and dignity, together with timely investments in countries of origin, must remain central to sustainable solutions strategies.
3. That sustainable responses address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, including host governments and communities, refugees, donors, and countries of origin.

Sustainable responses significantly complement the 'solutions' objective of the Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, in which we have been actively involved as one of the three Champion agencies since the conclusion of the mandate of the Secretary General's Special Advisor on IDPs.

**Chairperson, distinguished delegates,**

Strengthened partnerships, adequate funding, and regional solutions strategies are crucial to ensuring the continued progress towards achieving sustainable responses and addressing the concerns expressed by host countries.

*Regarding strengthened partnerships;*

The two Global Refugee Forums, held in December 2019 and December 2023, during which numerous pledges supporting more sustainable responses were made, demonstrated the multitude of partners willing to come together in the search for solutions to forced displacement.

Our partnerships with United Nations sister agencies, particularly WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, UN-Habitat, ILO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) - especially in the context of mixed movements - are being strengthened, fostering greater collaboration in implementing sustainable responses. In several countries, Resident Coordinators are actively contributing to this effort, including by leading the implementation of the United Nations pledge 2.0 made at the last Global Refugee Forum.

NGO partners, both national and international, remain the backbone of refugee response efforts, not only in emergency situations but also in supporting the inclusion of refugees into national social services.

As reported in previous years, development actors, including International Financial Institutions both global and regional such as the Asian Development Bank, African

Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank and the Council of Europe Development Bank - have incorporated the challenges of forced displacement into their strategies. Besides providing additional resources, they offer expertise to better measure and manage the impact of refugee presence.

In recent years, I have referenced our partnership launched in late 2022 with the International Finance Corporation to support private sector interventions in refugee response as well as the Joint Data Center launched together with the World Bank in 2019. This has led to encouraging progress, with increasing numbers of financial institutions and companies working alongside the IFC to expand access to financial services. Similarly, the Joint Data Center has enabled 29 countries to include forcibly displaced populations in national surveys, shaping \$3 billion in inclusive development programmes and driving policy changes that open the door to economic opportunities. This year, we have established a new team with the World Bank focusing specifically on the critical programmatic connection between humanitarian and development action to help achieve sustainable responses. A presentation by Mr. Xavier Devictor, who is leading this new initiative, will take place during the lunch break today. Delegates from Denmark, Brazil, and Zambia will also be on the panel and we very look forward to your active participation.

Finally, as you will hear from the Bureau Directors, regional intergovernmental organizations are also playing a pivotal role in the search for durable solutions to refugee crises.

*Regarding the need for adequate funding;*

Humanitarian resources to respond to an ever-increasing number of forcibly displaced persons are stretched. In 2024, appeals launched for refugee responses were typically funded at 35 percent. The appeal for the Sudan situation, for instance, has thus far been funded at 31 percent.

As stressed by Kelly, we hear with great concern announcements made by some of our main donors of impending reductions in ODA. Furthermore, as you will also hear from Bureau Directors, the impact of the pause in foreign assistance announced in January by the United States, our largest donor, has been immediate and severe. We are looking forward to seeing this indispensable support resume as soon as possible.

On the other hand, we should also welcome the increasing amount of development resources made available to refugee hosting countries. Since 2017, the World Bank Window for Host Communities and Refugees has generated \$4.9 billion in investments across 92 projects in 20 low-income host countries. Additionally, under the Global Concessional Financing Facility, \$966 million in grants have facilitated \$7.7 billion in concessional loans to seven middle-income countries since 2016. Bilateral development actors are also key in bridging humanitarian and development efforts while reinforcing protection priorities. According to the latest data from the OECD, an average of \$2 billion is contributed annually to forced displacement settings.

*Regarding regional solutions strategies;*

The three solutions platforms launched at the 2019 GRF, namely the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), the Comprehensive Regional Refugee Framework in Central America and Mexico (MIRPS), and the IGAD Support Platform, as well as the Support Platform for the Central African Republic Situation launched in 2023, continue to play a key role. These forums where countries of origin and asylum can meet and agree on ways to better protect and assist refugees while seeking durable solutions, are pivotal. The respective Bureau Directors will most certainly elaborate on the respective Support Platforms, but I would like to highlight the engagement of the SSAR support platform, chaired until recently by the State of Qatar and since October 2024 by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. At a time when forced returns of Afghans are taking place despite serious human rights concerns and a fragile socio-economic situation, the crucial role of the support platform cannot be overemphasized.

Among the limited repatriation operations currently ongoing, I should mention the return of Burundian refugees from Tanzania, which requires more attention and financing to ensure that those returning can rebuild their lives. Lastly, while the situation in Syria remains fragile, some 300,000 refugees have returned over the past few months, and it is planned that up to 1.2 million Syrians could be repatriated in 2025. Massive financial support will be required for the success of this operation.

**Chairperson, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,**

To conclude, as forced displacement continues to increase, we would like to express our appreciation for the indispensable financial and political support we receive from you, and to the host countries for your continuous generosity. The sustainable responses approach will ensure a more effective use of the resources mobilized for the benefit of refugees, host governments and communities, countries of origin, donors, and other stakeholders.

Thank you for your attention.