

**U.S. Statement
at the 76th Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee
General Debate
Delivered by Chargé d'affaires Tressa Rae Finerty**

October 6, 2025

High Commissioner Grandi, UNHCR leadership team,

Thank you chair, good afternoon colleagues.

The humanitarian and refugee situation today demands our collective honest reflection and reform. We have seen in recent months just how much of the global humanitarian system relied on the United States paying a disproportionate share of costs. That imbalance will no longer continue.

As President Trump has made clear, abuse of the asylum system by economic migrants seeking to undermine immigration law has reached epidemic proportions and now threatens support for the asylum principle itself. That must change.

The issues we face are significant but not without solutions. Solutions that we can find together with UNHCR's expertise and member states' experience.

For the United States, the most important solution is peace. Humanitarian aid can save lives in the short term, but only peace can end displacement in the long term. Humanitarian needs do not exist in isolation, and responding solely with aid without tackling the underlying causes will leave us addressing symptoms rather than resolving the crises at hand.

We also need to ensure the United Nations' own institutions are getting back to basics by sticking to their core operational mandates with clear recognition of national sovereignty. UNHCR's mandate is to protect refugees and facilitate permanent solutions to displacement, and it plays an essential role in emergency response.

However, over time, UNHCR has expanded its scope beyond this original purpose, taking on responsibilities that have stretched its capacity and diluted its focus. While we appreciate the efforts of fellow member states, we cannot endorse a statement of solidarity at a time when so much remains unknown and the need for reform is too urgent. Instead, we call on everyone here to advance meaningful change.

As the United Nations approaches its 80th anniversary, this is a pivotal moment to demonstrate that institutions can evolve to meet new realities. For UNHCR, this means a renewed focus on efficiency, transparency, and accountability, a willingness to embrace innovation, and the discipline to stay true to its original mandate while working with others to avoid duplication. The recent reductions and reorganization must not be treated as short term financial savings. They must represent fundamental, measurable change.

Specifically, we call on UNHCR to enact budget reforms that produce a more reasonable and achievable program budget for 2027, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to address the most pressing humanitarian needs. These reforms must prioritize fiscal discipline, operational efficiency, and measurable outcomes, enabling the agency to deliver meaningful results while avoiding overextension. With staff costs making up the largest portion of the UN regular budget, those costs must be part of any UN80 cost-containment discussion. Further, more transparency on staff costs is needed so member states can identify which entitlements are driving cost growth over time.

At the same time, UNHCR must maintain a strong emphasis on oversight and transparency to advance accountability, ensuring that member states and stakeholders can clearly assess how funds are utilized and whether programs are achieving their intended goals.

We also urge UNHCR to eliminate all divisive and politicized cultural initiatives that do not reflect the shared values of member states. The agency's mandate is humanitarian in nature, and its focus must remain on addressing the urgent needs of displaced populations rather than engaging in activities that alienate member states or detract from its core mission. By

concentrating on its foundational purpose, UNHCR can strengthen its credibility and foster greater unity among member states.

UNHCR must maintain an unwavering emphasis on life-saving interventions, ensuring that refugees and displaced persons receive immediate shelter, food, and medical care. These interventions are the cornerstone of the agency's work and must remain its highest priority.

Fellow heads of delegations, colleagues, reforming UNHCR alone will not be enough to address the broader challenges of displacement and illegal immigration. The global framework governing refugee status and asylum must also evolve to meet the realities of today's world.

As State Department Deputy Secretary Landau discussed at an event in New York during UNGA high-level week, around the world, asylum systems are under enormous strain due to exploitation by economic migrants. Migrants who do not face genuine persecution use asylum as a pathway to circumvent border and immigration laws, placing unsustainable pressure on systems meant to provide temporary protection. This system no longer serves our nationals, genuine refugees, and the nations caught in between.

We stand ready to work with fellow states and organizations that share our vision for a system that protects those who genuinely face persecution while upholding the vital principle of national sovereignty, recognizing that sovereignty is not a barrier to cooperation but the foundation for meaningful collaboration.

If we are serious about reducing displacement, rather than simply managing it year after year, then we must seize this moment for change. Together we can change to meet this moment with UNHCR and fellow member states.

In closing, thank you to the high commissioner and staff working in the most difficult places in the field. High Commissioner, you said in the beginning of your statement there would be no farewells yet, so just let me thank you for all you do.

Thank you.