



Statement by

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76th Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee

9 October 2025

Palais des Nations, Geneva

Distinguished Chair,
High Commissioner,
Deputy High-Commissioner,
Assistant High-Commissioners,
Distinguished delegates,

Every year, the Global Staff Council brings to this Committee the voice of UNHCR staff. Our concerns have evolved with the challenges, but one reality never changes, the ability for UNHCR to fulfill its mandate rests on two inseparable pillars: the resources that Member States provide, and the people who transform those resources into protection solutions, often in the most difficult and dangerous conditions.

Back in 2022, in the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, we warned of the urgent need to strengthen the duty of care commitment, to protect national colleagues, and to safeguard institutional memory from the erosion caused by over-reliance on short-term contracts.

In 2023, we mourned the colleagues lost in the terrible earthquake in Türkiye. We recognized the courage of staff working under constant security-based evacuations and rising insecurity, from Sudan to the Sahel. We also urged recognition of long-serving colleagues and called for stronger protections against harassment, bullying, and retaliation, as well as safeguarding progress on diversity.

In 2024, the realignment exercise marked the beginning of major restructuring. It was complex and often painful, mentally, and physically, with many colleagues going through periods of uncertainty. That was a year of transition that profoundly affected staff, but it would pale in comparison to what 2025 was to bring.

This year, against the backdrop of a drastic decrease in financial contributions, the organization has faced a challenge of an entirely different magnitude. In less than twelve months, more than 4,900 colleagues have been separated or have left UNHCR — with further cuts to come.



This is a dramatic downsizing of our workforce, with immense organizational and human consequences. We are losing the experience of colleagues, national and international, who have carried the lessons of past crises, and those who knew how to navigate the most complex operations. For the thousands being separated — their families, and often their wider communities — the transition has been abrupt and shattering.

The recently concluded GSC staff survey underlines this human cost. Colleagues spoke of job insecurity, sudden loss, and the heavy toll on their health. As they say:

“The stress has become unbearable. I wake up every day with anxiety about the future and go to sleep wondering, will tomorrow be the day I lose my job?”

We must not leave staff to face this situation alone. We call on the organization — and by extension, on you, the Member States — to strengthen measures for work transitions, to extend voluntary separation programs, and to create robust social security safety nets. UN staff, unlike most national employees, have little to no access to national unemployment schemes or medical insurance. Together with the ILO Staff Union and others, we are advancing a proposal for the first contributory unemployment insurance plan within the UN system. We hope that Member States will support this initiative when times come.

Distinguished Chair and Delegates,

UNHCR was created 74 years ago, as the conscience of the international community — a promise that the world would not turn its back on those forced to flee when peace failed them. Today, that promise is at risk. The recent cuts to UNHCR’s programmes are not just administrative adjustments; they are the direct consequence of declining contributions and shrinking humanitarian financing. These cuts affect not only our staff and operations, but the very lives and dignity of millions of displaced men, women, and children who depend on this collective commitment for survival and hope.

As global displacement reaches unprecedented levels, we must remember why UNHCR exists — to stand with the forcibly displaced until diplomacy and solutions can restore their rights and their future. This is not merely an institutional crisis; it is a human one. Every dollar withdrawn is a lifeline severed. Let us not allow indifference or fatigue to silence the conscience that gave birth to this organization.

A couple of years ago, UNHCR had several billion dollars in funding and over 20,000 staff. Today, we face very bleak projections for the 2026 budget, with a workforce to match. As the High Commissioner reminded us, with over 90 percent of staff serving in frontline roles, every reduction in capacity translates directly into fewer services and more lives at risk.



Now more than ever, we need clarity from you, our Member States. What is your vision for UNHCR? With what resources — both financial and human — will this mandate be undertaken?

The GSC understands the need for reforms. As Global Shared Services platforms are rolled out and new hybrid workforce models developed, it is essential that processes are managed transparently. Only then will reforms strengthen the organization rather than weaken its human core.

We do welcome the ambition of the Humanitarian Reset and the UN80 Initiative. We share the aim of reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and improving effectiveness across the humanitarian system. But let us reiterate: efficiencies must not come at the expense of staff wellbeing or the delivery of life-saving protection.

UNHCR has the most resilient and dedicated workforce in the system, and you have always known that you could count on us to be on the frontlines at every corner of the globe, to design and deliver protection in the most complex crises. Without staff, there is no UNHCR. Every budget decision, every reform enacted, every act of restructuring has a direct human impact. Staff are not just numbers on a chart — they are the presence, the protection, and the continuity that make the implementation of our noble mandate possible.

We recognize that the High Commissioner is doing his utmost to steer the organization through unprecedented difficulties, and that he has also sought solutions for staff, responding to the concerns we have consistently raised.

For the staff who remain, for those who have left, and for those who now face a more uncertain tomorrow, what matters is how this crisis is handled. We ask that you place fairness, dignity, and humanity at the centre of your deliberations. But without stronger and more predictable support from Member States, the damage to staff — and to the people forcibly displaced — will be profound and irreversible.

I will end with a quote from the video that you saw on Monday, with strong messages from UNHCR colleagues, refugee children in schools in Chad, Sudanese families resettled, returnees in Syria... All this work that we do every day, with passion and pride, and that we want to continue doing.

Who are we if we do not do everything possible to help the most vulnerable?

Who Are We If We Cannot Make a Difference?

Thank you.