



**Statement of H.E. Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher,
Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States and International
Organizations,
Head of Delegation of the Holy See to the 77th Executive Committee of the
United Nations High Commissioner's Program for Refugees (UNHCR)
*Geneva, 12 October 2026***

Mr. Chair,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I would like to thank the High Commissioner for his leadership and engagement during his first year in office, and to acknowledge the commitment of the UNHCR staff, often facing on the ground dangers and hardships in assisting those who have been forced to flee.

This Executive Committee takes place once again under dire circumstances, with over 117 million forcibly displaced, that is, one in every seventy people¹. Among them, there are many children, including those unaccompanied or separated from their family, women and girls exposed to violence and exploitation, and religious and ethnic minorities persecuted for their faith or identity. Refugees are at the center of today's tragedies. The scale of their suffering, whether from the conflict in Ukraine or in many other parts of the world, including the Sahel, Sudan and South Sudan, Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar, highlights the urgent need for a collective response driven by our shared humanity, solidarity and responsibility.

Mr. Chair,

Protection is not an end in itself, but rather an essential interim measure until more permanent solutions can be implemented. Therefore, it is concerning that the tragic scale of displacement is becoming increasingly greater than the number of solutions being achieved. In this regard, the Holy See welcomes the emphasis on finding solutions and promoting the self-reliance of refugees, and agrees that displacement should never become permanent.

¹ Cfr. <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/207807/unhcr-reports-first-decline-in-global-forced-displacement-in-a-decade>

The passing of time does not make a refugee crisis more tolerable. Like all human beings, refugees have skills and aspirations, and they should be given the opportunity to contribute to their host communities, through access to healthcare, education, decent work and legal status. These elements are essential to achieving a “standard of living that enables full physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”² of the person. They allow individuals to become the true protagonist of their own destiny, fostering their integral human development, without being kept in a state of dependence or excluded from access to necessary resources.

Among the durable solutions, voluntary repatriation remains the preferable choice for many. Fortunately, the situation in some countries has improved enough to allow refugees to begin returning home. However, what makes all the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful return lies in *how* people return home, and whether they are able to do so safely, and with adequate follow-up assistance, including provisions for settling property questions and land rights. To make this work properly, predictable and guaranteed funding from international partners is essential.

Mr. Chair,

History offers evidence not only of human violence, but testifies moral progress and humanity’s capacity to establish institutions that safeguard life. Among the most significant of these developments was the adoption, 75 years ago, in the wake of the immense suffering and massive destruction caused by World War II, of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention laid down basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees and enshrines noble principles, such as the right to seek asylum, the prohibition of refoulement, and the recognition that every refugee is a person endowed with inherent dignity. Asylum remains among the finest gestures that humanity has to offer to those who are persecuted. It is also the concretization of one of humanity’s most ancient and shared acts of compassion. This is why upholding these protections is not only a legal obligation, but also a moral imperative.

Therefore, it is particularly concerning that all of the aforementioned noble goals are increasingly being called into question, including through policies and practices that undermine their original purpose. Pope Leo XIV expresses the hope that the spirit which inspired the drafting of this important international instrument “may also continue to enlighten the consciences of national leaders today. No one can turn a blind eye to those who are seeking protection and safety.”³ The challenge that all countries face today is in working together to find solutions that meet both the legitimate needs of their citizens and their obligations to refugees in a way that does not undermine international solidarity. This is a moral, legal, and political challenge that must be addressed collectively.

² Pope Leo XIV, Message for the 2026 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 27 September 2026.

³ Pope Leo XIV, Appeal after the Angelus, 21 June 2026.

Mr. Chair,

It is not enough to consider the consequences of forced displacement; the underlying issues must also be addressed. Promoting dialogue at every level to tackle forced displacement and its root causes is essential for preventing and resolving divisions and crises. Ultimately, the most comprehensive and effective way to realize the aspiration of every refugee and to achieve durable solutions is to ensure the rights of all to live in their countries of origin in dignity, peace, and security.

At a time when financial difficulties are jeopardizing vital assistance to refugees, may our decisions be guided by fraternity, solidarity and collective responsibility.

Thank you.