

**STATEMENT MADE BY PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TURKEY H.E. RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN AT THE OPENING
SESSION OF THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM
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Unofficial Translation**

Distinguished Heads of States and Governments, Distinguished Secretary General, Distinguished High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to whole-heartedly salute you all with love and respect on behalf on my nation and my myself.

At the outset I would like to take this opportunity to thank the High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. Grandi and the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland Mr. Cassis for being such gracious hosts here in Switzerland this morning. I also would like to thank Mr. Secretary General and the High Commissioner for inviting as co-convener of this Forum.

The international community is now embracing the most unprecedented levels of refugee influxes of all human history. Throughout the world, there are currently nearly 260 million migrants, more than 71 million displaced individuals and a total of or more than 25 million refugees. This number is increasing almost on a daily basis due to famine, poverty, internal conflict, terror attacks and political uncertainties together with other economic reasons. People are not embarking upon a journey just to find a better job or to achieve a higher standard of living. They are mostly forced to migrate from their motherlands and left alone to earn a minimum level of living, to have food, to serve to their family members and to provide their children with at least a promising future.

Unfortunately, this journey of hope that they embark upon usually ends in death and demise. Only within the last 7 years, more than 20,000 people, of which the vast majority are women and children died or got lost in the dark waters of the Mediterranean. Under the hellish heat of the Sahara Desert thousands of lives were lost forever.

In the background of the refugee influx, as we label it in this day of age, you will find great humanitarian drama and a very bitter story. The bodies washed ashore clearly state the fact that this is a global crisis that can no longer be ignored. I am not just talking as the President of a country that is situated right next to where most of these global crises are taking place. I am talking as the Head of State of a

country, according to the data provided by the UN, that hosts the largest number of refugees on a global scale. Additionally, Turkey stands to be the most generous country vis a vis the humanitarian aid it provides, in ratio to its GDP.

No country in this day and age can afford the luxury of labelling this situation based on the proximity to where the crises are breaking out. Today, our fates are sealed and our destinies are common. And I hope and pray that this Forum will be instrumental in terms of tackling the refugee crisis from a humanitarian point of view once and for all.

The Global Refugee Forum should help us extend a helping hand to all the victims around the world who have been feeling slightly inspired by our gathering this morning. We should give them hope for their future.

Ladies and gentleman,

Turkey is ranking high amongst countries in the global scale trying to battle the ramifications of irregular migration and refugee influxes. Currently we are housing more than 5 million displaced individuals, of which 3,7 million are of Syrian descendants. Once after the conflict broke out in Syria, we have embraced a policy of doors wide open and we have never deported any individual that sought refuge in our country.

The well of nations of the world set cord us to welcome a very insignificant amount refugees that seek out for a better life outside their countries. Without any discriminations we have opened our arms wide to all of the refugees seeking to find peace in our country, regardless of race, religion, language or ethnicity. With the exception of some isolated incidents, nobody is isolated nor discriminated against the refugees living in our country. As the state, whatever conditions we avail for our citizens we avail the same rights and fundamental services to the refugees and migrants. They are people. That is why we could not shut our doors on their faces. In order for our Syrian brothers and sisters to attain certain level of self-resilience, we have offered services ranging from education to medical health care, from recruitment to child care. And our endeavours are still underway.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Here on this platform, I would like to share with you some figures which are the “summaries of the summaries” of what we have back home. At the level of primary education we have provided 655,000 Syrians children access to school.

The schooling level of the Syrian children grew up from 30% to 63% in the last five years.

We have insured that 34,000 Syrian descendants were provided access to graduate and undergraduate programs in our universities. While the access level of refugees to higher education is around 1% in the global scale, this figure is 6% in our country. We have provided scholarship programs to more than 21,300 Syrian students either in the form of Turkish language courses or university education. We have insured that the Syrian displaced children and other refugee children would attend the same classrooms and same schools as the children of local communities.

In order to facilitate to access to health services, we have established immigration health care centers in the cities and provinces where the influx was the highest. In these centers, we have 678 Syrian doctors, 954 Syrian midwives and nurses currently employed.

In the last 8 years we have welcomed 516,000 Syrian new born babies. The moment they were born, these babies we provided equal access to all sorts of medical care as provided to Turkish families. All of our endeavours are towards Syrian descendants' integration to the Turkish public. We want our people and refugees to get together more frequently, especially around provinces where the Syrians population is on the rise so that social and cultural bonds could be restored. We are organizing several program for convergence.

Distinguished Heads of States and Governments, Distinguished Secretary General, Distinguished High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentleman,

The Global Compact has 4 fundamentals pillars in the form of objectives. One of them is self-containment and self-efficiency. In order for this to be possible, we have launched several projects and laid the groundwork, the legal groundwork, if you will, for the Syrian refugees to have access to the possibility of permanent residence and citizenship.

We are always encouraging Turkish entrepreneurs to recruit more and more Syrian employees. In every province, we have courses available for vocational training and language skills development.

Many of Syrians in our country are capable of standing on their own two feet now. Meanwhile, our humanitarian aid to the Syrian descendants are continuing in an

uninterrupted fashion. Turkish Red Crescent; AFAD, the Turkish Disaster Relief Agency, and other NGOs are providing psycho-social support programs to the Syrian refugees, including welfare aid.

We are also extending a helping hand in the form of regular humanitarian aid to the Syrian citizens who have been displaced within their motherlands. We are attaching greatest significance to identify refugees who are most vulnerable and feeble. In line with indicators of UN in that regard, we established help desks for refugees to apply in the case dire need.

According to the UN criteria, we have spent until so far 40 billion dollars for the sake and the wellbeing of the refugees. Meanwhile, the amount of the pledges received from the International community remained infinitesimal. The EU previously pledged 3+3 billion Euros for the refugees. With this funding, the institutions in Turkey were supposed to be supported. However, so far we have only received from the EU 2 billion Euros, which were directly allocated to NGOs. I'm just giving you these figures in order to show you the severity of the situation. We are still waiting at the threshold of receiving the other 3 billion euros that was pledged.

We have received an additional international aid in the form of 450 million euros. On this occasion I would like to take this opportunity to thank the UNHCR for the support and solidarity that they have showcased. Whether it be Mr. Guterres, or Mr. Grandi, they have always been very supportive of our country and they have taken ownership of this dire situation.

Distinguished Heads of States and Governments, Distinguished Secretary General, Distinguished High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is so clear that efforts of countries such as Turkey will not suffice to solve this problem once and for all. This is a very unfortunate incident that is hurting our conscience. In order for a sustainable and a permanent solution to be possible, we have to take global steps forward in full cooperation. We haven't yet reached the desired level of global ownership of the refugee crisis. We attach great significance to the Global Compact on Refugees to be implemented in its full accord. And I hope and pray that the Global Refugee Forum here in Geneva, will be instrumental in terms of implementing our previous commitments.

The solution to the outstanding problem of refugee influx crisis deriving out of Syria is far from being confinement, but it is political solution that can be shared

with other countries around the world as well. This is a burden that we have been bearing for the last 9 years. We need to find a formula which will allow the refugees to remain in their homelands and the ones who have already travelled to Turkey, to be peacefully returned and settled in their motherlands.

Surely all refugees should enjoy the right of voluntarily going back to their motherlands. The settlement programs will be very important in order for stability and normalization to be established. What is equally important is fighting terrorism. I have been speaking about these facts with many leaders around the world. And I have been launching an appeal to establish a peace zone in the Northern part of Syria. And all of the leaders that I have previously spoken to have seemed to have been in favour of my suggestions. I told them that they should support me. The projects are already there. They have been drafted, so let's implement these projects once and for all. But the giants of the world, the most well off nations, while they seem to praise our projects and are smiling at us, when we ask for support, we receive non.

Look at the situation in Afghanistan. Look at the Situation in Iran. There are refugees, coming from Afghanistan, passing through Iran and opening out to Greece. What are we doing? We are obliged to readmit them, deport them back to Afghanistan. And similarly, as my brother PM Imran Khan of Pakistan mentioned, there are refugees going to Pakistan from Afghanistan. The numbers are quite striking.

How are we going to handle this situation? It is an outstanding problem that we have to consider. Even something more important than anything else is the Rohingya problem in Arakan in Myanmar. We cannot underestimate the situation in the field, there is famine, there is poverty, there is misery, there is nowhere to hide, nowhere to find shelter. We have to own up to the people.

As the countries around the world, we have to be concerned about the problems of the entire human race in order to support the dire situation down there and find a solution. We shouldn't leave UNHCR alone in her endeavours and her struggles. Many of our Western friends, approach the problem of refugee influx from a security and stability point of view and based on some interest. Some of the countries working hard to keep the barbwire that keep the refugee influx out of the continent. Of course this is wrong. We have seen shameful acts of leaving refugee boats to sink in the Mediterranean Sea. They pierced these boats and buried those people deep into the waters of the Mediterranean.

Some of the politicians, particularly racist political parties, are pioneering animosity towards refugees in order to garner higher amounts of vote with xenophobia and rhetoric against refugees. Within the context of fighting DAESH, terrorist organizations were attacking our lands from right next to our Syrian borders. Our borders were continuously harassed by the terrorist organizations. How could they be supported? They even did ethnic cleansing.

There is a graffiti in Aleppo that sums up the situation in Syria that has been going on for the last decade very bluntly. “If the children here were bleeding oil the situation wouldn’t have immediately unfolded the way it did. Unfortunately, the efforts that were spared to protect the oil yards were not mobilized for the security and safety of the children in Syria. In the face of such an atrocity and without the support from the international community, we had to take care of our own selves and we had to stand on firm grounds. We had launched the Operation Euphrates Shield and the Olive Branch Operation in order to clear an area of 4000km of DAESH, PKK and YPG terrorist organizations’ presence. As a result of the Sochi MoU, we had stopped a humanitarian tragedy from breaking out in the city of Idlib in Syria, that had the potential of impacting 4 million additional individuals. And on October 9th we launched Operation Peace Spring. We cleared an area of terror presence with 420km width and depth of 30km. We want this area to remain safe. Let’s clear these lands from terrorist organizations once and for all, let’s declare these areas as safe zones and lets implement these settlement and housing projects all together, let’s have hospitals, let’s have schools and let’s allow the refugees to go back to their motherlands peacefully and in a dignified fashion. But nobody, seems to be inclined to help us. Why? Because oil is a much more needed commodity. YPG and PKK terrorist organizations are attacking civilians. Despite that fact, these areas are now the most safe and stable zones of Syria, which are inhabitable. The Syrian refugees, should go back on a voluntary basis. But we know what powers of the world will be disturbed of the settlement peacefully and in a dignified fashion.

The Palestinian refugees were condemned to continuously cry for their motherland. But the same oppression and tyranny should not be repeated in Syria. Where do you think the Palestinian refugees currently reside? In Lebanon, and in Jordan. Are we doing anything about the Palestinian refugees? No. On the contrary, there are those who are calculating how much further they can occupy Palestinian territories.

Around the regions in the northern part of Syria, where we launched our military operations, 371 thousand Syrians have returned voluntarily and in a dignified fashion. If we can get the projects that I have talked about at UN General Assembly, I think that returns can easily reach 1 million in a short period of time.

Mr. Secretary General, Mr. High Commissioner,

We hope and pray that these projects can be materialized as soon as possible, with your prospective support. And we are hoping to host a donor conference with the aim of achieving our targets. The UN should be a paragon for these endeavours to be completed in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the other possible solutions for the settlement of this dispute once and for all is to allow the refugees to continue their living in third countries. However we haven't reached the desired level in that direction either. Especially for vulnerable refugees, resettlement quotas and third country solutions should be increased. They are very low. Xenophobia and animosity towards the refugees are one of the most striking challenges that the refugees have to fight against. These people have left everything that they owned behind. But using their choices or their obligations as a vessel for political gain would be a shame and a sort of embarrassment for everyone choosing to do so. In order to establish social peace and prosperity, we have to fight discriminatory policies and we need to always encourage refugee integration vis a vis the public, if we want to surmount the outstanding hurdles down our path.

Our country is sparing no effort in order to ensure that special projects are undertaken in order to eradicate any forms of misinformation, any forms of misinterpretation vis a vis the public and the problems of the refugees in order for the social peace to be preserved once and for all.

I hope and pray that in this regard, the Global Refugee Forum will be a platform where we can embrace the motto of joint responsibility for our joint future. And it is going to be instrumental for the improvement of the living standards of the refugees everywhere.

At the 15th century, when the Ottoman Empire opened its doors to the Jewish refugees fleeing the inquisition, the rulers then said "I'll give up my throne, I'll

give up my crown but I will never give those up on these refugees who sought refuge in my land”.

I salute you all.