

**Statement delivered by H.E. Mrs Katrin Saarsalu-Layachi  
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**UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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Thank you Mister/Madam Chair,

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Allow me also to thank the UNICEF's Executive Director Ms Henrietta Fore for her important keynote address and the High Commissioner for his opening remarks. I would now like to add some additional remarks in the national capacity.

The world today is not the same as it was a year ago. The coronavirus has not only changed the way we work, study or even greet each other, but it has put an extra layer of suffering to the people already in vulnerable situations. While the humanitarian organizations are under immense pressure to continue to deliver, the socioeconomic implications of this unprecedented global health crisis are yet to come. This crisis has placed the frontline medical and humanitarian workers at especially high risk and the humanitarian organizations to an extremely difficult situation, whereas access to the people they need to assist has been severely affected. The conflicts have not stopped and many cases even escalated. As an elected member of the UN Security Council Estonia has strongly supported the Secretary General's call for global ceasefire in order to allow the humanitarian

organizations to continue their lifesaving work, we have also constantly raised the issue of protection of first responders in different council discussions.

Estonia highly appreciates the UNHCR's work around the globe. We would like to thank again the High Commissioner and the whole UNHCR staff for your tireless work and leadership in those most challenging and extraordinary circumstances.

Estonia has been a stable and predictable **contributor** to the UNHCR. In response to COVID-19 Estonia contributed to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and provided unearmarked funding similarly to previous years. We have supported the alleviation of the Syrian and Venezuelan crises and the IDP situation in Ukraine. However, COVID-19 crisis also showed us that we need new **innovative approaches**.

Firstly, the pandemic has proved that **digitalization** is more urgent than ever. The mention "data is the new gold", should in humanitarian setting be replaced with "accurate data is life". This should therefore be in the center of our forthcoming protection discussions. UNHCR's work on identity management and inclusion, by using digital identification and biometric technologies, is well advanced. Estonia pledged at the First Global Refugee Forum to contribute to that work by providing our expertise on human centric approach to identity management and data protection.

Secondly, the global health crisis has also proved that we need more **coordinated** approach in data handling to be able to protect the most vulnerable. The biggest challenge remains the lack of interoperability between humanitarian organizations

that leads to duplication. Harmonized and secure data management and longer-term projections would help to create a more efficient and resilient humanitarian system. Also, bolder and better-coordinated cooperation, not only among humanitarian, but together with development actors, would contribute to that goal. Estonia therefore welcomes the establishment of the Joint Data Center (JDC) in cooperation between UNHCR and World Bank and is proud to be among its Council members.

Thirdly, the continuation of **education** is fundamental. In a few short months, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the biggest disruption of education systems in history. Refugee and other forcibly displaced children and youth were already at a grave disadvantage before the pandemic, with girls in especially vulnerable situation. According to the UNHCR`s report on education, released in September, the post-lockdown forecast for refugee girls is particularly grim - half of them will not return to school when classrooms reopen. Innovative approaches must include finding a way to secure access to education also in times of COVID-19. By providing connectivity and affordable internet access along with e-learning solutions, we can keep on educating the children, as it is crucial to minimize the risk of a lost generation. As a firm believer in digital, Estonia has supported education in emergencies, for example provided the Za`atar and Azraq refugee camp children in Jordan with IT -trainings.

Finally, as true believers that the human must be in the centre of all solutions, we would like to commend and support the UNHCR`s reform efforts to further regionalize and decentralize the important life-saving services the UNHCR is providing.

Thank you!