

UNHCR Executive Committee 71st Session, 5-9 October 2020
Agenda item 3: General debate
Statement of Lithuania

Mr. Chair, Mr. High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. We would like to add some remarks in our national capacity. We wish to commend the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and his able staff for their important work and for their resilience and flexibility in these new and challenging circumstances caused by the global pandemic. This new severe situation made a huge impact on all of us. Many projects had to be put on hold, especially so during the initial weeks and months of the pandemic. We all had to adapt as we were moving forward. We highly value UNHCR's approach, that you stayed and delivered where you were needed most. This has exactly been our attitude as well. In the light of recent developments in Belarus, the Government of Lithuania has been granting permissions to access the territory of Lithuania on humanitarian grounds, and has already granted such a permission to 412 persons from Belarus.

Mr. Chair,

Last year's first Global Refugee Forum served as a significant milestone for our individual and collective efforts towards putting the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees into practice. Despite all the difficulties posed by the global pandemic we are well underway with implementation of our commitments. This year has become a challenge to resettlement programs, but we are able to resume our procedures now. Moreover, our GRF commitments included but were not limited to major reconstruction of the reception centre for asylum seekers, which is well underway and is to be finalized by the end of the next year. This year a number of municipalities have been involved in a pilot project which aims at the development of a more comprehensive integration policy at local level and creating a network of local actors investing in integration policy development. A legislation has recently been passed to facilitate access to the labour market for some categories of asylum seekers. Our universities cooperate on asylum-related education and research.

At the start of this ExCom session the High Commissioner has also reminded all of us of our pledges and commitments made at the last year's high level session on the phenomenon of statelessness. We do not consider this to be a big issue in our country, since number of stateless persons is very low and since nearly everyone of them is provided with a long-term residence permit. Nevertheless, certain improvements were necessary. Those included an active outreach to the stateless persons informing them on possibilities to acquire the citizenship as well as the submission to the Parliament, in July this year, of a draft legislation proposing to grant the citizenship to children of stateless persons that legally reside in the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Chair, High Commissioner,

We support the activities of reform, results-based management and decentralization implemented by the UNHCR, and we value the necessary transparency demonstrated along the way. As the High Commissioner rightly pointed out, the COVID-19 has been a "stress test" to all activities. Lithuania recognizes the value of flexible unearmarked contributions for the implementation of the mandate of the UNHCR. In this regard, we have heard your call and we acted accordingly.

Mr. Chair,

In conclusion, I would like to assure you of Lithuania's continued engagement and cooperation. Thank you.