

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, HRH PRINCESS LINDIWE AND HEAD OF THE ESWATINI DELEGATION TO THE 73RD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S UNHCR PROGRAMME (10-14 OCTOBER 2022).

Chairperson

Please allow me to convey special greetings from His Majesty King Mswati III and the people of the Kingdom of *Eswatini*. His Majesty's Government extends its appreciation at the invitation to participate in this meeting.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to be here today and for the opportunity to speak on a matter of global concern and critical moral consequence.

The Kingdom of *Eswatini* aligns itself with the High Commissioner's opening statement. We further commit to strengthening cooperation with the UNHCR and other stakeholders.

Recognising and emphasising displaced persons as having enforceable rights, is key to instilling a sense of duty and obligation within the bureaucracies with which they interface. The services and facilities rendered to persons of concern cannot be given grudgingly without diligence and enthusiasm.

The understanding arising from this apt theme – “***that everyone has a right to seek safety***” – should have the effect of improving refugee service delivery. Efficient processing and secondary settlement outcomes remain key indicators of our collective duty to displaced persons.

Chairperson

In the Kingdom of *Eswatini*, our communities require no encouragement. It is our custom, as *Emaswati*, to welcome those in need with kindness and generosity. This is more so when a

community member encounters a predicament. When it is within our power to help as neighbours, we do so wholeheartedly.

This commendable culture naturally flows to refugees who arrive in the Kingdom as strangers but must be assimilated to become brothers and sisters in our communities.

Chairperson

The Kingdom of *Eswatini* places a high premium on its obligation to provide for refugees; and it has taken the necessary steps to bring its legal environment into harmony with these obligations. Through the Refugee Act of 2017, the kingdom's legal regime is now fully consistent with our international obligations and precludes the detention of refugees in addition to decriminalising illegal entry into the country. These legislative principles recognise the desperate circumstances displaced persons often find themselves in, often pushing them outside the limits of legality by necessity of survival as opposed to a criminal calculation.

While much work remains, *Eswatini* continues to make progress towards ensuring that the country is fully compliant with the letter and spirit of the refugee convention. Indeed, we were pleased by the non-refoulement commendations from the UNHCR. His Majesty's Government will not compel refugees to return to countries where they could be subjected to persecution of any kind.

Chairperson

The Government of *Eswatini* is also committed to improving the processing of asylum applications. More cases are now being determined on a monthly basis as a result of changes that increase the efficiency of our refugee status determination process. There is still room for improvement and we continue to work with other government agencies that interface with refugees to improve the speed and quality of their processes.

The Kingdom has also instituted a tripartite alliance comprising of the Ministry of Home Affairs, World Vision and the UNHCR with a view to improve the social and economic outcomes of refugees.

Among its' initiatives, the alliance is working on a livelihoods project at *Ndzevane* Refugee Camp. Presently we are piloting a vegetable production project involving 52 refugee households; and in this regard, we are encouraged by the dedication of World Vision as a protection and livelihoods implementing partner. We also continue to explore various sustainable economic integration models to accompany resettlement.

Chairperson

The Kingdom of *Eswatini* is committed to eradicating the causes and consequences of statelessness. Therefore, I am pleased to report that on the 16th of March 2022, the Kingdom and the UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Agreement for implementation of the National Action Plan to Eradicate Statelessness. Currently, the Ministry of Home Affairs is undertaking a mopping exercise aimed at improving national birth registration levels and ensuring an updated and credible national population register. We are also finalising a study on the stateless population in *Eswatini*. These initiatives will inform the government on the magnitude of statelessness so that commensurate measures may be put in place.

As I conclude, I am happy to also report that the National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Bill No.16 of 2022 is currently before Parliament having been tabled under a certificate of urgency.

As we continue to ensure that everyone exercises their right to seek safety no matter where they are, we maintain our appeal for international assistance, to ensure that, as refugees come to the kingdom, they find the environment suitable for making a home away from home.

I thank you