

Remarks of Ms. Rema Jamous, UNHCR Regional Director for MENA

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Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

While we gather in this room, civilians across the MENA region are once again bearing the brunt of a devastating and brutal conflict not of their choosing. As of today, 1.2 million people have been forced to flee their homes due to the recent escalation of hostilities, many not for the first time. Civilians, including first responders and humanitarian workers, have been killed or injured; residential areas destroyed; and critical infrastructure damaged.

These developments have further eroded coping capacities and deepened humanitarian needs for millions who were already displaced, living in poverty, or at risk, as well as for the communities that have been hosting them for years, in many cases for over a decade.

In response to the current situation, UNHCR has rapidly mobilized across affected countries, scaling up protection services and lifesaving humanitarian assistance, working closely with governments and partners to reach both those newly displaced and communities already under strain. In places like Lebanon, this response is being delivered by our colleagues who are themselves directly affected by the crisis, many of them displaced or living amidst the constant bombardment and insecurity. Their dedication under extraordinarily difficult circumstances remains central to our ability to deliver.

This new emergency comes at a time of already severe resource constraints, limiting our ability to scale up responses to meet growing needs. UNHCR, like other humanitarian organizations, is facing an unprecedented funding gap, driven by rising needs and declining resources, which in the region amounts to USD 1.3 billion for 2026.

More broadly, since the last time I addressed you in this forum, the Middle East and North Africa remained marked by instability, compounded by overlapping conflicts and ongoing political and economic pressures. On the eve of the current hostilities, more than 24.3 million people were forcibly displaced, many facing protection risks

and in dire need of humanitarian assistance. This number has multiplied exponentially with the latest emergency.

Renewed hostilities in Gaza led to further loss of life, extensive damage, and the continued degradation of essential services. At the same time, increased violence in the West Bank and persistent instability along the Lebanon–Israel border triggered additional displacement and prolonged barriers to return, even before this current escalation.

Despite the challenges, it is critical that we do not lose sight of solutions. Returning home is what most refugees ultimately want, and it is something we rarely have the opportunity to witness. In **Syria** today, and for the first time in over a decade, a window of cautious optimism has opened for people to make that choice.

By the end of 2025, nearly 1.3 million Syrians had returned from abroad, and approximately 1.9 million internally displaced people had gone back to their home areas. This is in addition to 180,000 people who have since returned from Lebanon, amid recent hostilities.

UNHCR is supporting this process by providing targeted assistance, including cash and modest shelter, and livelihood support, helping people take the first important steps toward rebuilding their lives.

Many refugees in neighbouring countries, however, continue to cautiously monitor evolving conditions on the ground. Localized violence and insecurity have recurred in parts of the country, economic recovery has lagged, and the lack of shelter and basic services remain critical barriers to return. This is where we look to you, distinguished delegates. Sustained investment in host countries — already grappling with their own challenges — *and* inside Syria, is essential to ensuring that returns remain voluntary and sustainable, and that those returning have access to the basic necessities of life.

Away from news headlines, protracted and complex crises like **Yemen** continue to deteriorate, leaving over 22 million people - half the country's population - in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, increasing operational constraints – including detention of UN staff, seizure of assets and significant delays in residency renewals- are limiting our ability to respond to growing needs. Despite this, UNHCR remains committed to staying and delivering.

As you heard from my colleagues this morning, the conflict in Sudan continues to force many to flee, including to North Africa. **Egypt** is now not only the largest country receiving Sudanese refugees, but also the top recipient of asylum claims globally. UNHCR will continue supporting the Egyptian Government in the phased implementation of its asylum law and the transition to a nationally led asylum system, critical to enhancing protection safeguards.

Libya was also one of the major host countries for Sudanese refugees while grappling with its own challenges. UNHCR continues to lead the inter-agency response supporting refugees in the country, despite the constrained protection space and a decrease in resources.

Onward movements of refugees to and within North Africa, as well as across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, continued, and so did the tragic loss of lives along these routes. We are working closely with governments and partners to provide protection and solutions along key routes in order to reduce the dangers of these journeys.

Distinguished delegates, across the Middle East and North Africa, displacement continues to outpace available resources. Protecting those forced to flee, sustaining life-saving assistance, supporting host countries, and advancing solutions all depend on continued partnership. At a time of rising needs and shrinking budgets, predictable support is essential to preserve protection space, stabilize communities, and prevent further displacement. We remain committed to working with you to help displaced people rebuild their lives with dignity, safety, and hope.

And as the Secretary-General has consistently reminded us, wars do not solve political crises. Hostilities must end, and diplomacy must prevail. Only through political solutions can displacement be prevented, suffering reduced, and durable solutions advanced.

Thank you.