

Filippo Grandi takes helm as new UN High Commissioner for Refugees, speaks of focus on solutions

Filippo Grandi, a UN official who has worked in refugee and political affairs in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, began his 5-year term as UN High Commissioner for Refugees on 1 January, succeeding António Guterres whose more than 10 years in office ended last week.

High Commissioner Grandi, who arrived at UNHCR's headquarters office in Geneva earlier today, takes up the position at a time of unprecedented displacement challenges. Record numbers of people globally are forced to flee war and persecution, including more than one million refugees and migrants who crossed the Mediterranean to Europe during the past year. Other challenges include critical shortfalls in humanitarian funding, fewer voluntary returns than at any time in more than three decades, people staying in exile for longer periods of time and increased politicization of refugee issues in many countries.

"UNHCR is navigating extraordinarily difficult waters," Grandi said. "The combination of multiple conflicts and resulting mass displacement, fresh challenges to asylum, the funding gap between humanitarian needs and resources, and growing xenophobia is very dangerous. The road ahead is a challenging one, but I hope that - working with governments, civil society, and other partners - we will make progress in ensuring international protection and improved living conditions for millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people. I also hope that solutions to crises of displacement will be pursued with renewed determination by addressing their root causes and investing adequate political and material resources. UNHCR, whose mandate includes the search for solutions, stands ready to work with all those pursuing this goal."

Mr. Grandi (58), who is from Italy, has worked in international affairs for over 30 years, 27 of them with the United Nations. Formerly head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), he worked prior to that for the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as Deputy Special Representative, following a long career with UNHCR in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and at the organization's Geneva headquarters.

UNHCR works worldwide to protect, assist and find solutions for refugees, internally displaced people and stateless populations. It has some 9,700 staff across 126 countries, many of them working in humanitarian emergencies and in close proximity to regions of conflict. In June 2015 it reported that worldwide forced displacement had reached a new post-World War II high of 59.5 million people. Displacement levels have continued to rise since, most visibly with the situation of more than one million refugees and migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe during 2015.

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