

UNHCR: 1 in 10 Syrian refugees will need resettling

GENEVA, March 29 (UNHCR) – The UN Refugee Agency is hosting tomorrow (March 30) a one-day, high-level conference in Geneva focusing on refugees from Syria and the need for generating a substantial increase in resettlement and other answers for their plight.

The conference is one of several key events in 2016 to do with Syria's refugees. It follows February's London Conference on Syria which focused on the financial dimensions of the humanitarian challenge posed by the more than 13.5 million people in need inside Syria and the 4.8 million refugees in the surrounding region along with the needs of communities in host countries. And it comes in the run up to September's summit on refugees to be held at the General Assembly meeting.

"Refugees fleeing conflict and violence and arriving in Europe carry an important message: addressing their plight cannot only be the task of countries and communities that are close to wars. It is a global responsibility that must be widely shared until peace prevails again," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said.

"Giving at least some Syrian refugees an opportunity to move on to better lives, and relieving the burden on countries hosting millions of refugees are important gestures of solidarity. Let us not miss this opportunity," Grandi added.

The focus of the March 30 conference is the need for expanded, multi-year programmes of resettlement and other forms of humanitarian admission, including involving countries that till now have not been involved in such initiatives.

Resettlement is not the only aim. Other such pathways include humanitarian transfer or visas, private sponsorship, medical evacuation, family reunion, academic scholarship, and apprenticeships or labour schemes. The event will also showcase innovative approaches, new partnerships, and successful case studies, and is an opportunity for governments around the world to be part of finding solutions for Syrian refugees.

The meeting will be attended by representatives of some 92 countries, 10 inter- governmental organizations, nine UN agencies and 24 non-government organizations. Speakers will include UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Grandi, together with representatives from key refugee-hosting governments.

Some pledges of additional resettlement and other humanitarian admission places are expected to be announced on Wednesday. However, given today's complex international context and with Syria's conflict continuing, additional places will be needed over the coming months and years, in particular to address the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and to relieve pressure on Syria's neighbours. In line with refugee situations elsewhere, UNHCR estimates that as many as 10 per cent of Syria's 4.8 million refugees fall into this category, and that well over 450,000 places will be needed before the end of 2018.

In connection with tomorrow's conference, the Campaign Director of Avaaz, Alice Jay, will today be handing over a petition to Grandi carrying over 1.2 million signatures in support of refugees. The petition, collected since last summer calls for increased resettlement and reunification of families alongside financial support to countries on the frontline of the crisis, among other things.

Avaaz, meaning 'voice', is a global citizens' movement which campaigns in 15 languages on six continents. A selection of photographs and messages of 'Refugees Welcome' from 23,000 Avaaz members around the world will be shared on a screen outside the conference hall tomorrow.