

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Statement by H.E. Dr. Hossein Zolfaghari

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Mr. Chairman

At the outset, I would like to extend my appreciation to you, as the Chairman of the 67th session of the Executive Committee and wish you every success. Allow me also to congratulate Mr. Filippo Grandi on his appointment as the High Commissioner and appreciate him and his capable team including UNHCR office in Tehran for all their tireless efforts to mitigate the sufferings of millions of refugees and displaced people all over the world.

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished Participants

As you are aware, the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted a huge population of Afghan and Iraqi refugees over the past four decades – the number of which amounted to more than three millions in some periods. During this long period of time, my country has hosted Afghan refugees – as one of the largest refugee populations in the world – based on the humanitarian and religious principles. Moreover, by providing assistance to them, Iran has played a vital role in solving refugee problem in the region as well as preventing the influx of millions of refugees to other countries. In addition to that, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced with numerous economic, social and security consequences due to the long presence of refugees including occupation of job opportunities as well as huge economic costs arising from the provision of educational, health and medical services to them. Recent developments in the region leading to a massive influx of asylum seekers towards the Europe to some degree revealed the heavy burden carried by my country during these years with its economic, social and security implications.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me here to express my gratitude to the High Commissioner for paying special attention to the problem of Afghan refugees as well as his recent visit to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the renewed steps taken by him in order to introduce the needs of refugees in the host countries to the global community and international organizations.

As the High Commissioner noted, in spite of the remarkable endeavors taken by the UNHCR in order to meet the needs of the Afghan refugees through attracting international assistance,

unfortunately these contributions and donations are minimal in comparison with the costs incurred by the Islamic Republic of Iran for meeting their needs.

In the health and medical section, different services are provided by my country to refugees including free-of-charge vaccination, maternal – child care, personal hygiene, environmental health as well as prevention of contagious and refractory diseases. In addition to that and in cooperation with the UNHCR office in Tehran, in the framework of hospitalization insurance as well as provisional hospitalization, all refugees are now covered on the basis of which, half of the relevant costs are paid by the government for the vulnerable refugees while the patients with special diseases and their families are provided with free-of-charge services which is considered as a unique measure taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In education section – according to our Ministry of Education, during the last educational year (2015-16), a number of 360,000 refugee students have been studying in primary and secondary levels. In addition to this figure, based on the instruction by the supreme leader on the necessity of the provision of education to all foreign children, over 48,000 students without identity papers were added to the above-mentioned figure in 2015 while their number is amounted to 51,000 in 2016.

It is estimated that the average annual educational cost for each refugee student is about 600 US Dollars while these students need 1300 schools of 12 classrooms for education. Also, from 1982 to 2015, a number of 656,222 refugees have attended literacy courses and acquired writing and reading ability.

In line with the empowerment of refugees and in order to provide proper condition for the promotion of the reconstruction of Afghanistan, 9560 refugees have attended in classes of Technical and Vocational training and succeeded to acquire necessary skills enabling them to find a proper job and return to Afghanistan. This success has been achieved through the initiative made by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the form of a tripartite cooperation with the UNHCR and Techno-Vocational Training Organization as well as national and international NGOs during 2011 to 2015.

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished Participants

Voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity is the best and most appropriate solution to the refugee problems. Here, I would like to extend my thanks to the High Commissioner as well as donor countries for doubling the financial contributions to Afghan refugees as reached to \$400 for each refugee.

We however believe that along with such contribution, creation of job opportunities, development of adequate educational and health facilities as well as outlining clear perspective, for resolving livelihood related problems are needed, so that proper grounds for sustainable voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees could be laid down.

Today, it is crystal clear that reluctance of Afghan refugees to return to their country is due to underdevelopment preventing them from repatriating their homeland.

Now, owing to resource constraints, incurring economic costs arising from the heavy burden of large numbers of Afghan refugees on our government and people has become very difficult, we therefore urge the international community to fulfill its commitments including reconstruction of Afghanistan to end this plight effectively.

We believe that the "International Conference on the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries" held in May 2012 in Geneva, has set the proper grounds for resolving the refugee problems.

However, it seems that the situation in Afghanistan necessitates some revisions in the solution strategy. In that case, paying due attention to the solution strategy would help to resolve the problems of refugees and at the same time contribute to the reduction of heavy economic and social burden on the shoulder of the host countries.

While appreciating the contributions of the international community especially UNHCR as well as donor countries, allow me to state that the above mentioned conference and its conclusions has provided the international community with the opportunity to meet the reasonable needs of refugees and allocate necessary resources in various areas and to play its constructive role vis-à-vis their voluntary repatriation.

Another solution for the problem of refugees is their resettlement in the third countries. According to the statistics provided by the UNHCR, the figure of refugees who have resettled in the third countries is very low compared to the number of refugees residing in Iran and I would regrettably say that this resettlement has not included the refugees with incurable and special diseases considering the fact that the costs related to their treatment place a heavy burden on the shoulder of the I. R. of Iran. Moreover, the number of accepted refugees does not comply with the high number of refugee's births which is estimated to be about 45,000 in a year.

We emphasize that the process of selecting refugees for resettlement should be carried out in a way so that a better protection could be offered to the vulnerable population, in particular refugees with special diseases.

Mr. Chairman

I wish to conclude my statement by hoping that this meeting would take effective steps towards resolving the problems of refugees and displaced persons by strengthening positive and constructive interactions between donor, host and origin countries. This will definitely contribute to reducing the calamities of these vulnerable people and strengthening their voluntary repatriation. And last but not least, actions speak louder than words.

Thank you