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**UNHCR- Executive Committee  
71<sup>st</sup> Session, 5-9 October 2020**

**General Debate**

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Mr. Chairperson,

High Commissioner Grandi, I wish you a full and speedy recovery.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Chairperson for his election.

I have the honor to address the 71st session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR at this crucial moment in history, where even this annual meeting has a different setting.

As every year, the meeting of the Executive Committee provides us with an opportunity to improve dialogue and to consider solutions for the millions of people who are currently on the move. This year, we should also consider the unusual times we are living and in that context, the excellent work performed by UNHCR, despite the unprecedented challenges that the organization is facing nowadays. This includes paying tribute to the many dedicated women and men who are committed to helping refugees wherever they may be, often putting their own lives at risk, even during this pandemic.

I would also like to thank High Commissioner Grandi for his opening remarks, where he highlighted many challenges, while encouraging us to work together to find solutions.

In this regard, as one of the positive outcomes of this pandemic, we would like to highlight the important role that new technologies and innovation can play. They can facilitate reaching people, providing more efficient responses to their needs, improving communication while guaranteeing safe distance, enabling work to continue even though contact among people must be reduced .

Accordingly, Israel, a longstanding supporter of UNHCR, one of the fifteen original members of the ExCom, and recognized worldwide as the start-up nation, stands ready to share its innovative spirit and solutions.

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the High Commissioner and his office for the many reports presented to us. In this line, we would like to present some comments, in line with some of Israel's priorities.

Firstly, we take note of the reference to the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy in certain programs, but would like to request that the ExCom is kept

up-to-date, not only regarding programs in the field, but on the design of programs and the measures taken within the organization. This includes whether persons with disabilities and their representative organizations have been consulted or invited to discussions, as well as in UNHCR's reporting of the implementation of the Strategy to the UN Secretary General.

Secondly, we would like to highlight the importance of developing specific tools to combat sexual and gender-based violence, both, within the organization and in relation to the people of concern that UNHCR protects, ensuring a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse .

Regarding SGBV, we take note of the initiatives mentioned in the Note on International Protection, such as the "Safe from the Start initiative" reported, and we encourage UNCHR to continue with these actions and to consider expanding them.

Regarding combatting sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, we would like to add our voices to those who highlighted the importance that the allegations of actions committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo carries. In this regard, we take note of the introduction of a new "Administrative Instruction on conducting investigations in UNHCR" which incorporates best practices on investigations relating to sexual misconduct, including the implementation of a victim-centered approach. "

Moreover, we thank the information provided in relation to the investigation of alleged situations of sexual exploitation and abuse. However, we would appreciate clarification on why this year fewer cases were initiated, while it is reported that more complaints were presented. Notwithstanding this, we celebrate that those cases initiated have been finalized at a faster rate, and that they were included as priorities within the office of the Inspector General.

Furthermore, we noted that the report of the Inspector General mentions that the cases of sexual harassment have decreased. Although this should be a good sign, we are surprised to find that of "the 27 cases implicating UNHCR personnel, approximately half of the victims decided not to pursue a formal process following informal consultations with the IGO, mostly because the victims did not want the subjects to know that they had lodged a formal complaint and decided to solve the matter informally through other mechanisms." In this regard, we would appreciate some clarifications: (i) Could you explain the role of the IGO during those informal consultations? (ii) What is your position regarding this decision to not file a complaint to avoid "the subjects to know that they had lodged a formal complaint"? (iii) Is UNHCR doing a follow up of these informal agreements or taking measures to ensure the protection of those people who decided not to present a formal complaint?

We are aware of the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner's strong commitment to fight against it, and appreciate the information received. We encourage UNHCR to continue this practice, but also to pay attention to these possible gaps and to the need to take further measures to eliminate these practices from the organization and ensure the zero tolerance policy.

Finally, we are forced to reply to the Syrian representative and set the record straight. If they are interested in identifying the root causes of Syrian people fleeing, they are very clear: the Assad regime is gazing and murdering its own people. This is the why people are fleeing Syria. It is simple, it is basic: if the regime kills people, they will leave to try to survive.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.