



PHILIPPINES

72ND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAM

Agenda Item 3: General Debate

04-08 October 2021

Speaking time : 5 minutes

Thank you, Madam/Mr. Vice-Chair.

High Commissioner, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

The Philippines associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Group of Non-Aligned Movement.

We began this meeting with a sobering statement from the High Commissioner on the difficult challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and armed conflicts that compound an already complex problem beyond the capacity a single state or the UNHCR to solve. He also made a compelling call for solidarity in the pursuit of shared responsibilities and solutions, at all levels, so we can better protect refugees, asylum seekers, stateless and displaced persons, and other persons of concerns.

We agree that we need to press ahead in solidarity and reject trends of isolationism and apathy, in the face of tightening borders, stretched resources, social fatigue, and protracted crises that demand, more than anything, comprehensive political solutions to end conflict and build enduring peace.

The pandemic in the past two years has been a test of basic humanity, and the commitment of all the world to the pledge of leaving no one behind. This has been true in all societies including humanitarian settings, where the most vulnerable peoples in the most difficult circumstances need the most urgent assistance.

Madam/Mr. Vice Chair,

We believe that burden and responsibility sharing means compelling actions that are beyond comfort zone, beyond stop-gap, beyond token measures. Our vision for durable solutions necessarily requires the political will to resolve conflicts that prolong and complicate humanitarian situations and perpetuate human suffering.

Refugee-hosting countries, government and private donors, and international organizations all play indispensable roles in this ecosystem that links us all to the common aspiration of fulfilling the vision of the Global Compact of Refugees and relevant international conventions.

The Philippines endeavors to share that burden to the best of its abilities, even as we address our own unique challenges as a developing country. Without hesitation, we opened our doors to Afghan nationals, including women and children. We are designing a pilot Complementary Pathways program that can help a specific number of Rohingyas. We remain a safe-haven for the most vulnerable, as we have been throughout history. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte stressed this national policy during UN General Assembly, affirming that “*what we can do for humanity and to uplift human dignity, we will*”. The Philippines draws inspiration from a humanitarian history marked by the simplest of human traits – compassion.

Madam/Mr. Vice Chair,

As a country familiar with the adverse impact of natural disasters and climate change, the Philippines welcomes the focus accorded by the High Commissioner on the problem of climate-induced displacement. This is a reality that has become more pronounced recently, and for which any further delay in our collective responses means grave consequences. In the past few years, more and more of our communities have been displaced by violent typhoons, which have become more vicious and unpredictable. The Philippines' response has been to mainstream disaster resilience in all areas of policy and levels of governance. We have forged partnerships in this regard with the UNHCR and other UN organizations on pilot projects, from prevention, to addressing displacement, to recovery and Building Back Better. We attach high value to the work of the Platform for Disaster Displacement, a State-led initiative that sustains global attention on the issue of displacement in the context of disasters and climate change.

The Philippines understands the agitation from stakeholders over token actions on climate change, which as we have witnessed, have heightened vulnerabilities and driven waves of internal and cross-border displacement. We have advocated in various fora for climate justice, the principles of common but differentiated responsibility, and the recognition of the impact of climate change on the humanitarian condition and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights.

Madam/Mr. Vice Chair,

We continue to improve policies and institutional frameworks for protection and finding solutions for persons of concern. The Refugees and Stateless Persons Protection Unit under the Department of Justice plays a critical role in the whole-of-government approach, coordinating policy-making

and implementation. During this pandemic, we rolled out several programs that are small steps with big impact for persons of concern – including access of refugees to more employment, data sharing, legal assistance, continued registration, among others.

In the Philippines, eligible persons of concern can work, are beneficiaries of financial assistance, can access livelihood programs – efforts geared to integrate into communities. Our guiding principle is to uphold dignity in the lives of persons of concern so that they will be productive members of the society.

The national framework recognizes the complementary role of civil society and community organizations, whose presence on the ground aids the government in better understanding and addressing the needs of affected communities.

Madam/Mr. Vice Chair,

We are one with the High Commissioner in his emphasis that humanitarian work should stay above the fray and remain apolitical. We call on the international community to ensure that the UNHCR has the resource and mandate to carry on with its humanitarian work.

Finally, we acknowledge the work of the UNHCHR in the Philippines and pay tribute to humanitarian frontliners in all parts of the globe. Despite threats to their personal well-being and security, and tests of their resilience, tenacity, and dedication, they carry on, bringing the light and hope of all humanity to our brethren in most trying circumstances.

I thank you, Madam/Mr. Vice Chair.

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