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Mme. Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

All Protocols observed.

Hopeful yet concerned. This best describes how I feel when speaking to you today about the East, Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes region.

I am hopeful because, in the last year, countries covered by our Bureau, who already host some of the largest refugee populations globally, have commendably kept their borders open to new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia.

I see first-hand the challenges they are facing. Food insecurity is compounded by rising commodity and fuel prices, as well as climate vulnerability. But even in these difficult times, these countries welcomed families forced to flee their homes due to conflict, climate change or – quite often - a confluence of both. They have clearly demonstrated their willingness to respect their international obligations.

On the important issue of statelessness, it has been encouraging to see regional bodies like the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region progress on their commitments. I want to recognize Kenya for taking steps to grant citizenship to a group that has long been without a nationality – the Pemba. Soon these families will no longer live in the shadows and will be able to contribute to, and participate fully in, Kenyan society.

Finding solutions that enable refugees to live their lives in dignity and peace is a core part of our work. In a world where there are few such opportunities, I am delighted to say that we have seen some positive developments in our region.

Djibouti is making great strides towards local solutions, by including vulnerable refugees in national social protection systems.

Burundians are choosing to return from Tanzania, Rwanda, the DRC, and Uganda. A Round Table on Solutions for Burundian Refugees, held in November 2022, led to important commitments from government and development partners to invest in sustainable returns.

Likewise, we continue to observe progress on the IGAD-led South Sudan and Sudan Solutions Initiative. In South Sudan, the Pockets of Hope approach provides much needed support to some of the more than 125,000 refugees who returned home on their own in 2022.

Kenya is moving forward on their “Marshall Plan”, but national and regional authorities will need more funding for their efforts to pursue a more integrated approach in Dadaab and Kakuma-Kalobeyei.

We have increased access to resettlement. In 2022, we submitted more than 30,000 individuals to third countries, the highest number globally. With additional funding and quotas, we stand ready to do more.

Countries in our region are steadfastly working on the implementation of their pledges ahead of the next Global Refugee Forum. We invite you to make new and matching pledges to support them. We applaud regional bodies, like the East African Community and the Inter-governmental Authority on Development. The latter play an important convening role through the IGAD Support Platform launched at the 2019 GRF. We are proud that Uganda, long recognized for their progressive refugee policies, is a co-convenor for the next GRF.

Looking ahead, we have seen important political developments in our region. Parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia have taken encouraging steps to implement a peace agreement. As we saw with the High Commissioner when we visited Tigray, humanitarian access is improving, and we have been able to assist IDPs to return home.

However, even as we transition towards solutions, the needs in Ethiopia remain great. It is one of several countries in our region affected by drought. Since mid-February, impacted communities in Dollo, in the Somali region, are sharing their already meagre resources with thousands of people, mostly women, children and the elderly, fleeing conflict in Las Anod, Somalia.

The relationship between climate change, conflict and displacement is complicated, but the evidence is clear. Climate change *does* contribute to increased conflict. And conflict *can* exacerbate the impacts of climate change. We must invest more, both in political solutions, and in supporting preparation and adaptation in countries like Somalia, if we are to avoid yet another situation of protracted displacement in our region.

Last year, a concerted international effort supporting the Somali authorities managed to stave off looming famine. Nonetheless, in the first month of 2023 alone, we recorded over 280,000 new internally displaced persons due to conflict, insecurity, and drought. We are working closely with UN RCs and UNCTs, ensuring complementarity in our efforts to realise effective protection and solutions for IDPs, in line with the Secretary General's Action Agenda.

Two weeks ago, the IGAD Climate Prediction Centre announced that below-normal rainfall is expected in parts of the Horn over the next three months. As we enter our sixth consecutive rainy season with no rain, we are appealing for 137 million US dollars to respond to immediate needs in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. These resources will provide life-saving aid and mitigate the impact of the drought on those who have fled their homes in search of safety and assistance, as well as affected host communities.

In South Sudan and Sudan, we have seen increased incidents of flooding. Families have been displaced several times over because of the unabating flood waters. National and local authorities and aid agencies are doing their best but, again, the humanitarian needs keep growing.

Refugees continue to face reduced food rations due to rising food costs and the ripple effects of the Ukraine crisis. Food insecurity has a major protection impact – one that cannot be ignored. Women are most affected, with gender-based violations on the rise. If we can expand on investments

in livelihoods and financial inclusion, whole communities – both refugees and nationals – will be protected and uplifted.

As I stated at the start of my intervention - I am hopeful yet concerned. The region I represent is a complex one. But I am honoured to serve in it. I am immensely proud of the work we are doing. And I believe we can do more and do better. But - and now I must be blunt - as we gather here today, operations in the East, Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes do not have enough funding to meet the needs of displaced people and their hosts.

We are asked to do more with less. We are faced with impossible choices. Do we cut sanitation programmes or primary education? Or stop procuring essential medicines? Every day, host governments, UNHCR teams and our partners on the front line see the needs increase. In the absence of resources, we find ourselves unable to assist even the most vulnerable.

Everyone in this room has made a commitment to responsibility-sharing. The response in Ukraine has demonstrated what is possible when we rally behind a crisis. I hope the international community will similarly unite to support those in need in our region, and across the wider African continent.

There is no single solution to forced displacement and no one country that can tackle it alone. If our common goal is indeed to push beyond sustenance, and move towards finding solutions, we will require more international political and diplomatic initiatives, and the combined efforts of all actors working across the triple nexus.

I thank Member States and donors for your support, and NGOs, and UN sister agencies for our robust partnerships. I reaffirm our commitment to strengthening our engagement with local and refugee-led organisations, and ensuring we remain accountable to all affected populations.

Mme Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

Today, March 8th, marks International Women's Day. I want to take a moment to shine a light on women that you may not hear about elsewhere. They may not be famous, but they are my heroes.

- Women like Medhn and Azmera, two engineers from Ethiopia, who used their skills to build homes that can withstand the extreme weather in eastern Sudan.
- Women like Shamsa, who walked for eight days fleeing from conflict and drought in Somalia, in search of protection for her children, which she found in Kenya.
- Women like Foni, a refugee from South Sudan, born into exile. A recipient of the DAFI scholarship generously funded by Germany, she is now a Research Associate at Oxford University's Refugee-Led Research Hub, and brilliantly moderated the launch of our Regional Refugee Response Plan for South Sudan two weeks ago.

The determination, the courage, and the fortitude I have seen when meeting with displaced women and girls is inspiring. It is my hope that, by working together, we can find sustainable solutions that allow them to regain their agency, to pursue their dreams, their ambitions, and their goals, and to realise their full potential.

Thank you.