



ANGELINA JOLIE APPEALS TO GOVERNMENTS TO STEP UP LIFE-SAVING EFFORTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

GENEVA, October 4 (UNHCR) - UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie on Tuesday urged the international community to scale up its efforts to deal with the crisis in the Horn of Africa, saying the lives of hundreds of thousands of refugees depended on it.

In a speech in Geneva to the annual meeting of UNHCR's governing Executive Committee, or ExCom, the celebrated Hollywood actress described the situation in Somalia and surrounding countries as 'the humanitarian crisis of a generation' and said further help was urgently needed.

"Today, three-quarters of a million people are at risk of death in the next four months in the Horn of Africa," she said. "The work we are doing needs to scale up to meet the needs of these individuals. How we continue to respond to this period of malnutrition and famine is going to define the work of those NGOs, governments, and international organizations working in the Horn of Africa. It will, quite starkly, determine whether a huge number of people live or die."

Her remarks came as news reports from Mogadishu said scores of people had been killed in a suicide bomb blast near a government ministry.

Jolie also urged the Executive Committee's member states to remain committed to helping the world's refugees despite the global environment of increasing economic and financial pressures.

"The challenges that UNHCR confronts to provide for refugees are immense and growing. The rich countries of the world are increasingly feeling budgetary constraints at home. They face pressures to reduce rather than maintain their current and promised levels of aid funding," she said during her first address to ExCom, which reviews and approves UNHCR's programmes and budget, advises on protection issues and discusses a wide range of other topics.

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“Nevertheless, we hope that these governments will remain committed to the cause of the world’s most vulnerable people, while we recognize and are grateful to them for their generosity,” added Jolie, who also expressed gratitude on Tuesday to countries hosting refugees.

The Goodwill Ambassador also had praise for UNHCR’s committed and dedicated staff and other humanitarian partners. “They operate in some of the world’s most dangerous places, from Somalia to Libya to Afghanistan, in order to reach and help those in need. We thank them for all that they do and the personal risks they take to do it,” she said, while noting the increasing dangers that aid workers face. “We must demand greater respect for the concepts of independence, impartiality, and neutrality in order to ensure the safety and lives of humanitarian workers.”

Jolie was appointed as UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador in August 2001 and has since conducted more than 40 field visits, including to some of the most remote refugee-hosting regions. On Tuesday, High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres recognized her 10 years of service with the refugee agency by asking her to take on an expanded role for UNHCR as a Special Envoy in some of the world’s most difficult refugee situations.

“It is indeed my intention, with your agreement, that you will become our Special Envoy mainly in regard to the most dramatic refugee situations that require a lot of advocacy, but also to put them more strongly on the map to mobilize stronger international support,” Guterres told ExCom members in his remarks introducing Jolie. “We will be asking you to do more and more in this regard and we will all be counting not only with your commitment but also your diplomatic [skills] and your vision and insights on how to help solve some of the most complex problems that we face together with the international community.”

Jolie said her personal experiences with UNHCR “have been moving, sometimes heartbreaking, but always rewarding and unforgettable.” And she had discovered that refugees “are among the most vulnerable and yet the most resilient people on earth.”

An accompanying video and photos will be available shortly at <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/media>

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