

Speech by H.E Mr. Seyed Mohammad Reza Sajjadi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the esteemed High commissioner H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, and all his colleagues, especially the representative of UNHCR in the Islamic Republic of Iran and his team for their efforts to hold the international conference to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries with the aim of resolving the problem of afghan refugees. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Switzerland for hosting this very important conference.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

As you are well aware, outbreak of numerous conflicts in neighboring countries of Islamic Republic of Iran over the past decades has resulted in mass influx of millions of afghan and Iraqi refugees and displaced persons towards my country in search of a secure and safe environment, free from violence.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the biggest host countries of refugees in the world and still continues to host refugees and displaced persons after more than 3 decades. The long-standing presence of millions of refugees and displaced persons in Iran has imposed numerous socio-economic pressures on the capacities of the country in different sectors such as security, employment, education, health, and treatment.

The government has conducted the 7th round of AMAYESH or Refugee and Displaced Persons Census and has updated refugee population data and issued the smart residing cards for about one million persons.

Along with the census, the government has formulated two plans for identification of vulnerable people and the implementation of Health Insurance Plan by the contribution of the HCR in Iran. The Implementation of the said plan is clear evidence to the high quality of the services provided by I.R. of Iran for masses of refugees and displaced persons.

Hospitality and generosity of the Islamic Republic of Iran has always gone beyond international standards. There are heavy costs of 283,000 Afghan students attending schools, 7000 students in universities, and medical costs of around 3000 persons affected by special diseases. Occupation of about 300,000 job's opportunity by refugees I flow of remittances of employed refugees to their country, costs and expenditures of different sectors such as jobs, health, treatment, training, public transportation and security annually impose billions of dollars to my country.

It is quite apparent that this amount cannot be compared with the amount of the international response to the UNHCR Annual Appeal which in the best situation has reached to 39 million dollars recently.

While we express our thanks for the increase of assistance in the last 3 years, I am afraid to mention that the UNHCR allocated budget doesn't even meet the need of one single day of a million refugees.

On the other hand due to exercise of purposive subsidies law and actualizing prices, which increase in prices of basic commodities, the necessity for increasing international assistance towards refugees in my country is strongly felt.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

As you know ultimate goal of this conference is to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

I would like to inform you that after the fundamental changes and the establishment of legal governments in Afghanistan, a large number of the Afghan refugee and displaced population has repatriated to their own country. In the framework of a tripartite agreement and program of voluntary repatriation, between the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and the UNHCR from 2001, we have witnessed the return of about 887,000 refugees to Afghanistan.

Concerning the return of refugees, While the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the voluntary return as a the most preferred durable solution, we believe that the international community should take seriously its responsibility in providing ways and conditions of reintegration in country of origin and all needed services to return Afghan refugees to their country.

The Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the main countries affected by the problem. of protracted refugee situation believes that the voluntary repatriation meets in the best way the demands and interests of all relevant sides among other solutions.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

According to the surveys, the fact that why voluntarily return of Afghan refugees and displaced persons have sharply been reduced, goes back to the problems like housing, job and lower welfare standards that they are faced in returning to their own country. This in turn reduces their motivation to return.

In the previous relevant meetings, it has been concluded that the domestic problems of Afghanistan specially the shortage of housing, job opportunities, training, sanitary equipment and also the gradual trend of reconstruction have led to the slow trend of return and also the improvement and promotion of this trend require cooperation and partnership of all members of international community in sharing the burden of costs and responsibilities. Paltry cash and in-kind assistance offer no inducement for voluntary repatriation and in case of voluntary repatriation; reintegration will not be permanent for returnees.

Therefore Policies and approaches toward voluntary repatriation need to be enhanced. In this regard, the continued international assistance for strengthening the livelihood and meeting the needs of the returnee's refugees is required to be reformulated. In fact, assistance can be guided and channeled through the government. This approach will decrease the possibility of waste of resources and provide suitable condition for permanent residence throughout Afghanistan.

As ever, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that, sufficient budget could be spent on settlement arrangements in the returnee's main destinations and enough attention be paid to the settlement of returnees in their desired regions such as big cities or the reintegration costs to be paid in cash to them under certain circumstances.

The international community should play more active role in post-repatriation era and should contribute to the process of voluntary repatriation until the refugees could be re-integrated in their homeland. The enhancement of conditions of returnees in Afghanistan realizes a voluntary, secure and honorable return of refugees. We need to remain mindful of the fact that provision of assistance and motivation for the voluntary return of Afghan professionals to their homeland helps and expedites the reconstruction of their country.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

Concerning the resettlement, while considering resettlement as one of the durable solutions to the plight of refugees and the best way to sharing burden and responsibility by third countries, the number of resettled refugees from my country, is less than 1 % of HCR resettlement cases per year. The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly demands UNHCR and specially developed countries to set quota for resettlement proportionate to the huge number of vulnerable and needy refugees residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this respect I should draw your attention to the low number of resettlement states and highlight the possible role of the developed countries in fulfilling their international responsibility.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

As you are well aware, after 10 year of stabilization of legal Government in Afghanistan which provides fundamental change in that country, and opportunity for the international community to meet the rational needs of the refugee returned in Afghanistan and increase the needed funds in the construction fields specially establishing and equipping educational spaces and health centers for them. At the same time expedite their endeavors aimed at setting the proper economic infrastructures in Afghanistan to encourage the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and displaced persons for return and re-integration in their country.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

A recent survey has shown that a large number of afghan returnees faced with difficulties to restart and rebuilding their lives. Therefore it is incumbent upon international community to redouble its efforts for providing assistance for reintegration of afghan returnees in their country. In this regard, international community and UNHCR should perform tangible deeds and support the efforts to ensure the repatriation and sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees in Afghanistan.

In Conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I do hope that this conference with the lofty intention of international community to support the voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration of afghan refugees and assistance to host countries could effectively fill the existing gap between voluntary repatriation and reintegration and achieve the ultimate goal of resolving the prolonged problem of afghan refugees.

I thank you,
