

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

**REMARKS AT OPENING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH
COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
Geneva, 3 October 2016**

Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here with you today – almost ten years to the day since I was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations.

This has been a decade of dramatic events and epic challenges. Conflict, climate change and displacement traumatized millions of people. We are doing our best to respond to exponentially growing demands – with shrinking resources.

Ten years ago, we had fewer than half the 65 million displaced people there are today. These men, women and children have been through harrowing experiences that should haunt humanity's conscience.

Often, when they reach a safe shore, they see the UNHCR logo: a symbol of hope.

I pay my highest tribute to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and its dedicated staff on the frontlines of our global response.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The global displacement and refugee crisis has dramatically deteriorated since I spoke here two years ago.

In Syria, the Geneva Conventions concluded in this city to bring some semblance of morality to the dirty business of war have been flouted over and over.

If you consider all the refugees, displaced people, and those in besieged or hard to reach areas, there are thirteen and a half million Syrians who desperately need help. Six million of them are children.

I have met these refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece. I also met the Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, who was on the refugee team at the Olympics. Yusra

fled Syria in an overcrowded boat that started to sink. She risked her life by jumping into the Aegean Sea to help push the boat to shore.

When I think of Yusra's courage on the one hand, and the inaction of powerful leaders on the other, I am outraged by the bitter injustice of war.

The situation in Syria is one of the most dramatic and tragic in the world. And we must also remember the millions of other refugees from Yemen, Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and beyond.

More than six decades ago, I was displaced by war. I have a first-hand understanding of their fear and confusion.

But whether or not we have experienced conflict, we all have a responsibility to confront this terrible reality.

Injured children are being targeted in their hospital beds – along with the health workers who could have saved them.

Humanitarians, especially local staff and medical personnel, are among the most courageous people alive today – because so many warring parties want them dead.

More and more destructive weapons are being used against civilian targets in deliberate war crimes.

The wilful and blatant disregard of international humanitarian law is creating large-scale suffering and long-term damage. We urgently need countries to transcend their national interests and come together in a forceful, global response.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The numbers are staggering. Each one represents a human life. But this is not a crisis of numbers. It is a crisis of solidarity.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, is our plan to do better for the poorest and most vulnerable. The pledge to leave no one behind cannot be achieved unless we lift millions of refugees and displaced people out of poverty and misery.

The United Nations is doing everything possible to mobilize countries in a spirit of solidarity.

The London Conference on Supporting Syria in February pledged support for host communities and addressed ways to help refugees support their families and educate their children.

In March, we met in Geneva to commit to creating new pathways for resettlement of Syrian refugees.

In May, the World Humanitarian Summit produced strong commitments to promote humanitarian law, to go beyond meeting needs to reducing and ending needs, and to invest in humanity with sustained political and financial resources.

These international gatherings all aimed to revive the founding spirit of the United Nations centred on international solidarity, respect for fundamental human rights and recognition of human dignity.

We carried this forward at the Summit for Refugees and Migrants last month in New York.

Member States declared profound solidarity with people who are forced to flee. They reaffirmed obligations to fully respect the human rights of refugees and migrants. And they pledged support to countries and communities affected by large movements of refugees and migrants.

The New York Declaration can make a real difference in the lives of refugees – but only if the leaders who adopted it make good on their promises. We cannot congratulate ourselves on this outcome until it is carried out on the ground.

Immediately after the Declaration was adopted, I co-hosted the Leaders' Summit for Refugees, along with the United States, Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico and Sweden. It generated more humanitarian funding, forms of admission and opportunities for refugees to learn and earn.

This Summit showed how States, joining together, can put global responsibility into action.

Success is only possible thanks to the unrelenting advocacy and brave example of civil society representatives.

We see these qualities in this year's Nansen Refugee Awardees, the Hellenic Rescue Team and Efi Latsoudi. Their extraordinary volunteer efforts have helped thousands of refugees landing on Greek shores.

Their contribution embodies the extraordinary public solidarity with those who are forced to flee – and the humanity of communities around the world who assist refugees.

This solidarity is countering ignorant and self-serving leaders who try to fuel fear and distrust of foreigners for their own purposes in a cynical grab for power that makes us all less safe.

To address rising xenophobia, the United Nations has launched a new campaign, called “Together – Respect, Safety and Dignity for all”. It is designed to foster inclusive communities where diversity is appreciated as our greatest strength – so we can replace fear with hope.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

History will judge us on results. I ask you to turn your commitments into action, so that our children and their children can live in a world where everyone enjoys full human rights no matter where they are born or what circumstances they face.

Let us create this more just future for all.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment.