

**(AS DELIVERED)**

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

--

**REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
AT OPENING OF HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY  
SHARING FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES**

**Geneva, 30 March 2016**

Thank you very much for taking part in this High-Level Meeting on Responsibility Sharing for Syrian refugees.

We are here to address the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time.

This demands an exponential increase in global solidarity.

Today we will discuss important numbers – but first and foremost, this meeting is about people.

I have just come from Jordan and Lebanon, where I spoke to Syrian families, and the communities that are hosting them.

At Zaatari camp in Jordan, I met a young girl who wants to become an interpreter. I said that if she worked hard, maybe she could find a job with the United Nations because we always need interpreters! I could see her dreams shining in her eyes.

A boy with disabilities, a young leader in the camp, told me: “We need to learn and improve our knowledge, because knowledge will rebuild Syria.” I was indescribably touched by the determination of these young refugees to help themselves.

For me, these stories have personal meaning. Whenever I see people forced from their homes by war, I remember my own family fleeing our village, more than sixty years ago.

I was six years old. I saw so many young children who had no idea what was happening around them.

The United Nations brought us food, clothes, and textbooks. Thanks to the United Nations, I got through that terrible time with my hopes and ambitions intact.

Now, I am determined that the United Nations must do everything in its power to

help Syrian refugee children – and all refugees – to keep their dreams alive, as it did for me.

Five years into this conflict, Syrians are losing hope of supporting their families or educating their children.

Many people value that hope more than their own lives, as we have seen on the shores of Turkey and southern Europe.

Communities hosting refugees in neighbouring countries are exhausted. Health, education, and public utilities are overstretched and under-resourced.

The international community launched a new approach to these issues at the London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region last month. This approach is based on three broad principles.

First, we must give Syrian refugees hope of a better future, and the tools to build lives for themselves. We are working with our partners on initiatives that should create job opportunities and get all Syrian children back into school.

Second, we must give greater financial and political support to the communities that are hosting them, so that they are stronger and more resilient than ever.

And third, we must share the responsibility, including by expanding legal pathways for refugees into a greater number of countries.

That is not only the right thing to do. It is a fundamental tenet of the Refugee Convention.

Today's meeting is an important step towards those goals. It will be followed by the World Humanitarian Summit that I am convening on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May in Istanbul, where displacement will be high on the agenda.

Then in September, world leaders will gather at the High-level summit of the General Assembly on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, and at the United States Presidential Summit on Strengthening the International Response to the Global Refugee Situation.

Progress here in Geneva will lay the groundwork for success in all these meetings.

Syria's neighbours have shown exceptional hospitality.

Lebanon, a country of about four million people, has taken in more than one million Syrians.

Turkey hosts more than 2.7 million Syrians.

Another 600,000 plus are in Jordan. Some 250,000 are in Iraq and nearly 120,000 in Egypt.

The figures are numbing, but these are all individuals with tragic stories:

Children who have lost their parents;

Teenagers who are suddenly in charge of their families;

Men and women, old and young, who have experienced terrible atrocities.

Some carry shrapnel in their bodies. All bear the mental scars of displacement.

Last month in London, donors generously pledged \$11 billion at the International Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region.

Now these pledges must be honoured.

Today, I ask that countries act with solidarity, in the name of our shared humanity, by pledging new and additional pathways for the admission of Syrian refugees.

These pathways can include resettlement or humanitarian admission, family reunions, as well as labour or study opportunities.

States have pledged more than 178,000 places so far. I call on you to expand on these commitments – and I urge other countries to join.

When managed properly, accepting refugees is a win for everyone.

Refugees are famously devoted to education, improvement and self-reliance. They bring new skills and experience to an ageing workforce

Attempts to demonize them are not only offensive; they are factually incorrect.

I call on leaders to counter fearmongering with reassurance, and to fight inaccurate information with the truth.

UNHCR estimates that at least 10 percent of Syrian refugees need resettlement or another form of admission into a third country. That is 480,000 people – a relatively small number, compared with the millions being hosted by Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Today, they are refugees. Tomorrow, they can be students and professors,

scientists and researchers, workers and caregivers.

The best way to offer hope to Syrians is by ending the conflict.

We have a cessation of hostilities – but the parties must consolidate and expand it into a ceasefire, and ultimately to a political solution through dialogue.

We have more humanitarian space – but that must lead to unhindered access to all those in need.

My Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, is doing everything possible to advance the negotiations, and will require the unified support of the international community for them to show early results.

There is no military solution to the conflict, and there is no alternative to negotiating a political transition that will lead to a new Syria.

But until such talks bear fruit, the Syrian people and the region still face a desperate situation.

The world must step up, with concrete actions and pledges. All countries can do more.

Syria's children, Syria's future, are counting on everyone here today to be generous, to show solidarity, to ease their suffering and end their plight.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment for humanity.