

High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathway for admission of Syrian Refugees

High Commissioner's closing remarks

30 March 2016

Distinguished Delegates,

It has been a long and productive day and I thank you very much for your remarks and many diverse contributions. I wish to thank in particular our distinguished panellists for enriching the discussions.

The senior level of participants, including the personal attendance of the United Nations Secretary-General and the global representation at today's meeting, together with the extensive engagement give us hope. They are a clear recognition of the need for solidarity and responsibility sharing for refugees.

Today, you have expressed your gratitude for the efforts of the States neighbouring Syria. I have heard clear calls and concrete commitments to do more to assist the region. To this end, urgently fulfilling the pledges made in London remains a priority.

Yet this all comes against a backdrop of immense challenges. As underlined by many speakers today, there is no substitute for a political settlement and for peace to end displacement and suffering. Conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in Africa, Asia and Central America are causing ongoing displacement, leading often to dangerous secondary movements.

Last year, the global refugee crisis reached Europe and refugees and migrants started arriving in large numbers. We will continue to support Greece and we also continue to act in close partnership with the European Commission and the European Union Member States in managing the situation. It is clear that resettlement and other pathways for admission will need to be part of the solution. It is equally clear that this component will need to be large in order to also be meaningful.

In my opening statement I framed the purpose of our meeting today as an appeal - an appeal for new ideas, for new actors to engage, for new partnerships to be formed, and for commitments to open up new pathways for the admission of Syrian refugees.

UNHCR set a milestone target of at least 10 per cent of Syrian refugees in the next three years. It is an ambitious target, but not at all unrealistic against the needs. In fact others today have suggested that it may be too modest and, yes, they are probably right.

I am under no illusion that our appeal comes at a very difficult time, and within a troubling context. It would be easy to choose not to respond - 'not now', 'not in this way'. But my appeal to you is to resist that choice. The solidarity required is a global one. The collective effort of many States, and many actors within States, is essential.

Today has been an important event. For me the takeaways of this meeting are:

First, we have heard pledges that increase the number of resettlement and humanitarian admission places to some 185,000. The European Union made a commitment to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey by honouring existing pledges, committing to resettle up to 54,000 additional Syrian refugees from Turkey on a voluntary and activating a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme.

But this is only the start. We heard offers to significantly increase global resettlement programmes in the coming few years. And we hope that there will be several opportunities to do so in the coming months.

Second, a number of countries have announced that they would ease family reunification and increase possibilities for family reunion.

Third, other countries, in particular in Latin America, have announced new humanitarian visa programmes, or are expanding existing ones.

Fourth, several of you have pledged scholarships and student visa for Syrian refugees. I look forward to globalizing of what the World University Service has been doing.

Fifth, we have also heard about the removal of administrative barriers and simplification of processes to facilitate and expedite the admission of Syrian refugees.

Sixth, two countries announced important financial commitments to our resettlement programme.

We also heard from our traditional partners who offered to share their expertise and experience with new resettlement countries.

It is difficult to put exact numbers against these additional measures, but altogether they could provide a solution for tens of thousands of Syrian refugees. With you, we will keep track of their implementation and impact.

Many of you have also underlined the need to forge a partnership between private and public initiatives to make these avenues successful. Private sponsorship programmes in different countries have proven very successful.

Civil society has underlined its strong commitment to support both traditional pathways and to explore new approaches.

And increasingly we are hearing the voice of the private sector in the discussion about refugees. We can and should draw on its resources and the innovation it can bring. The reframing of crisis into opportunity including an economic opportunity is an important perspective. Labour mobility schemes are thus important additional pathways.

Distinguished delegates

We are looking forward to the World Humanitarian Summit. And, as many of you said, today's meeting is an important milestone on the way to the High-level Summit at the General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, and the United States Presidential Summit on strengthening the international response to the global refugee situation.

In closing, I wish to thank Ms Razan Ibraheem in particular. She reminded us of the real faces of this story. She has highlighted the value that opportunities for pathways can provide for Syrian refugees. And she is an illustration that this 'opportunity' is not a one-way proposition. She has embraced and is embraced by Ireland, her country of mutual adoption. It is a story with a happy ending. Please contribute to making many more such stories happen.

Thank you.