

2020 World Refugee Day Speech

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Everyone Can Make a Difference, Every Action Counts

Today is World Refugee Day. It has been 20 years since the United Nations designated 20 June as a moment during the year to reflect on the fact that millions of families have been forced from their homes because of violence or persecution, and to honor their resilience and courage.

Two decades ago, the numbers of refugees and internally displaced people seemed to be declining. Today the opposite is true. At the end of 2019, 79.5 million people were displaced from their homes. Around the world, the number of conflicts has only increased. UNHCR estimates that **1 out of every 100 people** in the world has fled their homes.

These numbers are overwhelming - and it is important to remember that these represent human beings – like you and me - whose lives have been torn apart, leaving their homes, family, jobs and schools behind.

In 2020, we mark World Refugee Day against a backdrop of dramatic social change. Not only have record numbers of people fled their homes to find safety - but the entire world is grappling with the consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This global health crisis is developing into an economic crisis, and in turn, has exposed raw social inequalities in our societies.

Racial discrimination and related intolerance are common causes of flight and can threaten the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees at all stages of the displacement. More needs to be done to eliminate racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia. And it is a fight that we have to continue - steadfast and determined - until all racism and xenophobia have been uprooted from the face of our planet.

These are challenging times. Yet, we have seen how the pandemic and the protests have created a connectedness that transcends borders. We have seen how people have become heroes in their communities by stepping up and leaning in to help. And refugees are contributing on the frontlines of the pandemic, despite living in extremely vulnerable conditions.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, refugees in many parts of Indonesia have joined hands with the local communities and supporters to sew masks that are then distributed for free to vulnerable Indonesians and refugees that needed to protect themselves from the virus. And during Ramadhan last month, young refugees volunteered to pack up food and basic needs for distribution to the poor in need.

Also, refugees and the internally displaced are volunteering as health workers in Colombia, making soap in Lebanon, sewing masks and protective gear in Kenya, helping construct isolation centers in Bangladesh and in so many other countries, refugees are contributing to help the needy everywhere. In the time of COVID-19, we have witnessed how everyone can make a difference and how every action counts.

In many refugee hosting countries, the pandemic presents a crisis on top of a crisis, where conflict and persecution continue to uproot families who, at the very same time, need to isolate. This has been a devastating task for countries that are already struggling to care for their own citizens. Almost overnight, ensuring hygiene, and building adequate shelter and isolation space became essential. The challenges have been immense.

We are very grateful for the warm support and solidarity shown by the Indonesian Government and community to the refugees during these difficult times. Our office continues to work closely in cooperation with the authorities and partners to ensure that refugees have full access to Indonesian health facilities and services in a non-discriminatory manner.

Over the years UNHCR has often found itself on the frontlines of emergencies, yet the challenges we face today are of an entirely different magnitude.

Our priority is to **stay and deliver** for the refugees, internally displaced and stateless people we are mandated to protect.

In December 2019, hundreds of partners, governments and individuals converged in Geneva and made a commitment to stand behind the UN Global Compact on Refugees and help UNHCR deliver on its mandate to protect refugees. Through these new challenges, we see the strength of that commitment being demonstrated every day. The response from government, the private sector, foundations and institutions and individuals has been truly extraordinary - it shows that we are stronger when we work together.

This World Refugee Day, UNHCR is appealing to everyone to help continue this global movement of solidarity and action.

Please, always remember that **everyone can make a difference**, and **everyone counts** when it comes to promoting inclusion, respect, and dignity for all, including refugees, internally displaced and stateless people.

We count on you to make your mark on the world and make it a better place for the humanity we all belong to.
