



UNHCR

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Agenda point 5(a)

**Statement by Volker Türk
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Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies, and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce the protection item of this year's Executive Committee. This session is informed by the Note on International Protection,¹ various protection papers,² and the June Standing Committee discussion.

Over the past year, we have again been confronted with the sobering reality of record numbers of refugees and displaced persons who have fled conflict, violence, egregious human rights abuses, extremism, and poor governance. Some of this displacement has been exacerbated by environmental degradation and climate change. We have seen, increasingly, forced movements of people across continents and through dangerous terrain, often in scorching heat, and traveling extraordinary distances – on foot through jungles, by boats on rough seas, or by hanging on to trains, buses, and lorries. Growing numbers of unaccompanied or separated children are also on the move, fleeing violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America, as well as in Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. These numbers are hardly surprising when we consider the multiplication of old and new conflict situations, notably in Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic, Yemen, South Sudan, Libya, and Afghanistan.

There is an obvious link between growing numbers of people on the move and the struggle to create the protection space they require and deserve. I would therefore like to share with you a number of reflections on how to honour, reconstruct, and expand protection space in all its manifestations – through the lens of asylum, humanitarian settings, our own operations, and the search for solutions. At the outset, though, let us remember that protection space is not possible without respect for the rule of law. This is why the rule of law is the theme of this year's Note on International Protection. It was chosen, not least, to recall the important legal foundations upon which the edifice of international protection is built, as well as UNHCR's own strong legal underpinning in its Statute and international treaties.

Bolstering asylum

In an environment where financing is scarce and asylum fatigue is discernible in some countries, preserving access to and ensuring the quality of asylum have posed significant challenges. Nearly nine in ten refugees live in host countries in the global south, most notably Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, the

¹ 63rd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Geneva, 24 – 26 June 2015: *Note on International Protection*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/559643499.html>.

² 63rd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Geneva, 24 – 26 June 2015: *Alternatives to detention*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/559643e59.html>; *Community-based protection and age, gender and diversity*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/559644dc9.html>; *Update on statelessness*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/559643a19.html>; and *Solution strategies*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/5596446f9.html>.

Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Jordan, placing considerable pressure on local infrastructure and services. The number of asylum applications in the industrialised world is significantly lower, but is also rising, albeit more in some countries than in others. Germany, for example, is projected to receive well over 800,000 asylum applications in 2015.

Many refugees are moving onward out of desperation, in search of safety, or to reunite with family members, but they find they have few options for doing so other than to risk the dangers of crossing the seas or traversing difficult land routes. While this is not a new phenomenon by any means, only recently have we witnessed the sharp increase in the number of people making these perilous journeys. Over half a million people have braved crossing the Mediterranean this year alone, including the nearly 3,000 who died at sea, and thousands have risked their lives in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea as well as in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, including the 35 who tragically drowned just last week when the boat they were taking to Yemen capsized. Those who survive arrive exhausted and are often traumatised, in need of urgent assistance and protection, only to find no structures in place to receive and host them, which worsens their plight. In response, we have offered concrete proposals on how to cope with these movements,³ stepped up our own operational activities – including in countries where we thought this would no longer be necessary – and supported Governments in meeting these challenges.

Many around the world are referring to this situation as a “crisis”, and many reactions to the growing numbers of refugees attest to the fears that this has created. We see this in restrictive border policies in a number of countries around the world. Access to territory has become seriously constrained with the institution of various barriers to entry, including fences and walls, a panoply of visa requirements and other restrictions, as well as interdiction practices. Such measures are often justified in the name of security concerns or are rooted in domestic political agendas unrelated to the actual presence of refugees.

Even when refugees are able to access territory, there is no guarantee that they will find effective protection. We know of this in the grave instances of *refoulement* or when asylum-seekers are detained, often in horrendously overcrowded conditions. We see this in deteriorating reception and living conditions and an upsurge in negative coping mechanisms, such as child labour, forced marriage, and labour exploitation. We hear of this in the testimonies of refugees who were kept in cages in jungle camps. All of these examples are part of a grim and deeply worrying picture.

During my field missions, I have made it a particular point to visit detention centres and to discuss with Government counterparts alternatives to current detention practices. The right to liberty is a fundamental freedom, which should not be constrained lightly. Yet, in too many situations, asylum-seekers and refugees, including children and women, are detained as a matter of course for no fault of their own, and as a result are criminalised. We are nonetheless making some progress in implementing our five-year *Beyond Detention* strategy,⁴ which provides a blueprint for support to Governments in twelve of our operations. We have engaged in dialogue on detention-related concerns and, more importantly, alternatives to detention, with a broad range of stakeholders, including Immigration Departments, Parliamentary Committees, Ombudsmen, and National Human Rights Commissions.⁵ This year, we have also issued two options papers for Governments on alternatives to detention and convened the second global roundtable on this subject with the participation of 24 States. Our training and technical support

³ UNHCR, *Special Mediterranean Initiative: Plan for an enhanced operational response, June – December 2015*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedocPDFViewer.html?docid=557ad7e49&query=strategic%20mediterranean%20initiative; Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea Initiative: Enhancing responses and seeking solutions June – December 2015>, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedocPDFViewer.html?docid=557ad6a59&query=bay%20of%20bengal%20initiative>.

⁴ UNHCR, *Beyond Detention: A Global Strategy to support governments to end the detention of asylum-seekers and refugees, 2014 – 2019*, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/53aa929f6.pdf>.

⁵ Including the UK Parliamentary Inquiry into the use of immigration detention; Parliamentary Human Rights Committee in Lithuania; and the Mexican Ombudsman.

have further strengthened capacities in a number of countries, including Indonesia, Lithuania, Malta, and Zambia,⁶ and work on an alternatives to detention policy in Canada is well underway.

In our dialogue with Governments on these matters, security concerns often seem to trump humanitarian and protection considerations, but they are not mutually exclusive. We have seen time and again how giving primacy to a security focus at the expense of protection has failed to bring about the desired results, often at great expense to taxpayers. Push-backs, building walls, increasing detention, and further restricting access, combined with few legal avenues to safety, will never be the answer. The impact is simply the diversion of refugee movements along other routes and the aggravation of already precarious situations in regions embroiled in conflict. Worse still, these measures compel more people who have nothing left to lose to risk dangerous journeys in the hope of finding eventual safety and stability. This creates an environment in which smuggling and trafficking can thrive. The logic of exclusion also reinforces the perception of refugees as a burden, while more and more studies indicate that host societies actually benefit tremendously from their presence and contributions – economically, socially, and culturally.

It is also becoming increasingly evident that the single most important challenge to the safety and protection of refugees arises from populist politics and toxic public debates, as well as the climate of fear they engender. This is often fuelled and abetted by irresponsible media reporting, lack of political and moral leadership, and xenophobia and racism. In some countries around the world, there has been a proliferation of xenophobic narratives, hate speech, fear-mongering, and inflammatory statements – both at the political and civil society levels. This contributes to a hostile environment, which has in some instances even led to arson or other violent attacks against refugees.

In this connection, and as the High Commissioner pointed out in his opening remarks, we have also noted with concern that the terms “refugee” and “migrant” have in a number of instances been used interchangeably in the media and public discourse. The two terms have different meanings, and conflating them has serious consequences for the lives and safety of refugees. Both migrants and refugees are protected under international human rights law, but the failure to mention refugees specifically is a failure to recognise their unique predicament – the absence of national protection, the risks they face should they return to their home countries, and our obligations to protect them under a legal framework crafted specifically for them. This can undermine public support for the institution of asylum at a time when more refugees need such protection than ever before.⁷

Ironically, some of this negative rhetoric is heard in countries whose own nationals, at various times in their history, also had to flee, or migrated in the hundreds of thousands. Many countries of destination all over the world today were at some stage in their history countries of emigration or produced refugees themselves. Let us not forget, for instance, that the Near East Relief Foundation saved thousands of lives during and after the First World War when Greek refugees were fleeing to Syria. During the Cold War, Western Europe had to cope with significant numbers of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe. There appears to be a disconnect between the migratory heritage of humanity and the politics and narratives around asylum and migration in contemporary public discourse.

In this context, preserving the institution of asylum is critical. Asylum is literally life-saving and has ensured the survival of millions of people for decades. This is not to say that the problems and challenges are not real, particularly in relation to adequate shelter, reception, and security concerns. This

⁶ Including trainings for the implementation of UNHCR/UNICEF/IOM guidelines for protection assistance for vulnerable migrants in Zambia; capacity-building on detention and alternatives to detention for immigration officials and other partners, including advocacy with the Social Office on the opening of additional shelters in Indonesia; and consultations with Governments on alternatives to detention in Israel and in Malta.

⁷ See “UNHCR viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'migrant' - Which is right?”, available at [http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=55df0e556&query=words matter](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=55df0e556&query=words%20matter).

is also not to question the sovereign right of States to manage their borders, including by controlling unauthorised entry and combating smuggling and trafficking. However, the situation needs to be addressed in a manner that is consistent with obligations under international law to protect asylum-seekers and refugees, including ensuring their right to seek asylum. All of this suggests that the more fundamental crisis that we are facing today is a crisis of values – the same values that gave birth to the 1951 Refugee Convention in the wake of the atrocities of the Second World War.

When we speak of asylum, we are also speaking about fostering an environment where messages of division, polarisation, and blame are supplanted with narratives of inclusion and support. There is reason for hope in this direction. We are already beginning to hear the voices of the once silent majority that embraces humanitarian and protection principles and does not give in to unsubstantiated fear-mongering and scapegoating. We are witnessing a remarkable outpouring of compassion and a groundswell of public support, including from faith-based organisations; NGOs; political, spiritual, and opinion leaders; private individuals; the private sector; and communities – in many cases driving Governments to change policies and rhetoric.

Although receiving communities and countries have struggled more than ever before to cope with large-scale influxes of refugees, security concerns, and funding crises, we have witnessed private citizens inviting refugees to stay in their homes or tourists taking over emergency care for those rescued at sea. Civil society groups and individuals all over the world have mobilised in large numbers to welcome and provide aid to people as they enter. We have further seen increasingly positive media coverage of refugees and local efforts to support them. Together we can ensure that such generosity and people-to-people solidarity become the norm rather than the exception. This will be critical for countering the xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric coming not only from extreme ends of the political spectrum, but also influencing at times the mainstream debate.

The quality of asylum is dependent on well-functioning asylum systems, including systems for determining status. These systems have come under strain both within States and in our own operations, and they require creative and practical approaches to sustain their effectiveness. UNHCR, for example, received more than 245,000 applications for refugee status determination [RSD] in 2014 alone. Even with a modest increase in our RSD capacity over the past two years, we were able to process only a third of these applications. This gap demands a significant reorientation of our traditional approach to individual case processing. We are considering how best to direct our limited resources while ensuring that RSD is an effective part of our overall protection management strategy.

From the start, we will need to identify and prioritise for RSD the individuals who need it most. To do so, RSD must be embedded in broader protection strategies that rely on community-based protection and outreach to identify individuals in need of protection interventions, including RSD. We are also exploring alternatives to individual case processing, for instance through temporary protection and facilitating rights to residence or migration through regional economic/free movement integration schemes [for example, ECOWAS and MERCOSUR]. In such contexts, individual processing would be primarily a measure of last resort. We are currently developing typologies of refugee situations and the strategies most appropriate for each of them, recognising that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach. Importantly, this will require greater Government engagement, even in the absence of accession to international refugee instruments, and we welcome your active support in this effort.

Chairperson,

In this spirit, I encourage us to consider how we can preserve asylum space in the face of so many challenges, not just as a moral and legal obligation, but also as one that can be managed in keeping with our core principles of humanity, dignity, and respect. In this sense, practical challenges should never override the protection imperative that we are not only obligated to uphold, but can uphold, provided we have sufficient political will, understanding, and resources. Let us remember that we have been able to do so successfully for refugee situations of similar magnitude in the past.

Enlarging humanitarian space within countries of origin

Preserving and expanding protection space must also guide humanitarian action for IDPs, affected populations, returnees, and stateless people inside their countries of origin. While protection in humanitarian contexts was traditionally the remit of ICRC, this has evolved over time to include humanitarian actors working within an inter-agency approach as part of the overall humanitarian response. We are investing more in ensuring effective leadership and coordination in humanitarian settings that can draw upon the different mandates of the organisations involved in complementary ways.⁸

The aim of protection in humanitarian settings is to save lives, ensure safety, alleviate suffering, and restore dignity. Involving multiple interventions over time, protection is dynamic, moving between prevention, preparedness, emergency response, and the search for solutions. It requires analysis and meaningful dialogue at the community and political levels, as well as with protection actors whose proximity to communities affected by conflict enables them to detect more quickly the need for protection and assistance responses.

It is particularly important to discuss within the humanitarian community what the protection element in these situations actually involves. "Protection" often means different things to different people. When parties to a conflict believe that violence is the only path to a solution, they will define and constrain humanitarian space according to their own interests. Time and time again, we have seen that "humanitarian access" is no longer in reality what we once understood and hoped it to be. We must also be cognizant of how humanitarian action risks being instrumentalised for other purposes, such as combating extremism or as a substitute for political action.

Humanitarian actors must be aware of the broader political context in which they work in order to ensure that our actions always serve a humanitarian imperative and are oriented and accountable to affected communities. It is important to be clear about what we can and cannot expect, and to be prepared to make tough choices. Possible actions are sometimes controversial and require difficult decisions. For example, in the situation of entrapped communities, we may find ourselves faced with dilemmas, including whether to evacuate people from besieged areas within or outside the country, as we did in the Central African Republic, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. In the absence of a functioning State and a direct resolution of conflicts, it will, however, be the only way out of an otherwise haunting reproach for inaction.

We must continue to take seriously the particular protection, assistance, and solutions needs of internally displaced persons [IDPs]. The precarious legal, social, and economic situation resulting from their displacement is something we experience daily in the 27 operations where we are involved in an IDP response. In many countries, IDPs have not been displaced just once, but multiple times, due to their inability to find safety or a sustainable means for survival. More often than not, they have experienced deep trauma and serious violations of their human rights. They may be disconnected from the rest of the population and find it hard to restart their lives. At the same time, for communities trapped in conflict areas, relocation to other parts of the country can be an important "protective" coping mechanism, and as such needs to be preserved in its own right.

My own visits to a number of countries with large IDP populations over the last two years have brought home to me the urgent need for promoting adequate legal and policy frameworks tailored to the specific protection needs of IDPs. For example, many domestic legal regimes are residency-based and do not address the impact and consequences of internal displacement, especially with regard to civil documentation; access to benefits and services; property, land, and housing rights; freedom of movement;

⁸ This is largely thanks to initiatives such as the Human Rights up Front Action Plan, the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, as well as a recent study by the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, *Ten Years After Humanitarian Reform: How Have Internally Displaced Persons Fared?*, available at <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2014/12/29-idp-humanitarian-reform-reports/Introduction-to-final-report-IDP-Study-FINAL.pdf?la=en>.

and voting. Many a humanitarian situation could have been mitigated – or even avoided – had there been a proper legal and policy framework in place accounting for the particular situation of IDPs.

We are not only witnessing new displacement, but also worryingly, more and more IDPs are living in protracted situations. Recent research by the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement estimates that 80 per cent of the world's IDPs have been displaced for more than five years.⁹ Protracted displacement, according to IDMC's 2014 report,¹⁰ is largely linked to a failure to anchor solutions for IDPs in broader development and peace-building programmes. There is a need to prioritise solutions to internal displacement. If we fail to address protracted displacement and invest in solutions now, we risk living in a world where IDP concerns are literally passed on from generation to generation, perpetuating old grievances and keeping simmering conflicts alive.

Fostering accountability in UNHCR operations

An important guidepost in our endeavours to preserve protection space is our collective accountability – including of this Committee – towards individual human beings. UNHCR prides itself on a deeply entrenched culture of accountability towards people of concern, largely as a result of our direct interaction with individuals; our proximity to where they are – even in remote, insecure, and inhospitable places on this earth; and a number of tools we have developed over time. This does not mean, however, that we cannot do better, even as we struggle to cope with rising needs and inadequate funding, which compel us to make often difficult choices, including in the protection arena, weighing needs against resources, reprioritising programmes, and reassessing current approaches.

Central to our approach has been UNHCR's Age, Gender, Diversity [AGD] policy that addresses the specific issues that arise in relation to one's age, gender, or other background. We have made advances in ensuring a strong AGD focus in protection management, including programming and protection-oriented humanitarian assistance. We have been able to concretise within our programmes what has sometimes been perceived as an abstract concept, leading to greater accountability to the individuals we serve. Through the AGD approach, we can help keep the focus on the individuals behind the statistics and avoid a process-oriented frame of mind.

A community-based approach to protection holds much promise in this regard, building upon the strengths and tailored to the individual needs of displaced communities. This approach obliges us to exercise humility and compels us to listen to and learn from communities about how they are coping. This includes refugee diaspora communities who can also play a role. They provide powerful testimony to host communities, recounting the reasons for their flight, and putting a human face on the problem. They can also be an important source of information, and their shared experiences can help inform the decision-making of others who may be considering dangerous onward movement.

Community-based protection includes investment in national and community capacity to reinforce social cohesion between the displaced – be they refugees or IDPs – and their host communities. This helps to preserve pluralism and diversity as well as promote peaceful co-existence. Community participation and empowerment are therefore essential elements of the humanitarian response. If empowered, refugees, IDPs, and host communities can better protect and support their families, realise the aspirations of their youth, and help each other restore their lives.

In our operations, coexistence is encouraged, for example, through community centres, where refugees or IDPs implement programmes for themselves and their host communities, such as social events, recreational activities, public information, and education. Cash-based interventions – a feature in many operations in the Syria and Iraq situations – can also contribute to peaceful coexistence by strengthening

⁹ See note 7 above.

¹⁰ IDMC, Global Overview 2014: people internally displaced by conflict and violence, May 2014, available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2014/global-overview-2014-people-internally-displaced-by-conflict-and-violence>.

local economies, especially when cash directed at the most socio-economically vulnerable refugees and IDPs is spent on local goods and services. Such activities can help to ease inter-community tensions.

Using a community-based approach to protection, we can also link more effectively our work on Age, Gender, and Diversity, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence [SGBV], child protection, and education, not only at the outset of an emergency, but also within broader protection strategies. By way of example, we have seen from the AGD report for 2014 that a greater focus on gender has resulted in an increase in the percentage of women active in leadership and management structures.¹¹ We have also recently initiated a review of our operational practices on gender equality, with a particular focus on updating UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women. As a result of SGBV programming and awareness-raising initiatives leading to more reporting, reported incidents of SGBV doubled in 44 countries. Communities engaged more proactively in SGBV prevention and identification of children, youth, and adults at risk. Through the *Safe from the Start* initiative, we sharpened our SGBV prevention and response in emergency situations. We further called more attention to the protection needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex [LGBTI] refugees by developing new training materials and providing training to 32 of our country operations. Thanks to efforts to promote greater awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities, the number of operations that reported providing tailored support to them doubled from 2012 to 2014.

We also continue to give primacy to the protection of refugee, IDP, and stateless children and youth. Children and youth account for 46 per cent of the global refugee population, some 90 per cent of whom live in the global south. Many spend their entire childhood as refugees, growing up in situations where violence and insecurity have become the norm. We have strengthened the Best Interest procedures and have seen improvements in non-discriminatory access to national services for children and youth at risk, in particular for children who are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

The year 2015 has been especially important, as the global community has unanimously adopted new Sustainable Development Goals that will have a significant impact on the lives and futures of children and youth. Many of the youth we work with are at a critical juncture in their lives, navigating the transition from childhood to adulthood in challenging circumstances, often with little hope and many fears for the future. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, refugee and displaced youth display resilience, resourcefulness, and unique talents, which – if appropriately nurtured and channelled – can assist not only in their own transition to adulthood, but also help them to realise their personal aspirations and make significant contributions to their communities.

Access to education is therefore critical. Through education, children and youth can cultivate their talents and nurture hope and a sense of possibility. Access to education is a significant step along the way to finding a solution. It ensures that we do not lose whole generations of refugee children and youth to protracted situations of insecurity, instability, and uncertainty, and that we can provide them with a sense of agency and direction for their future.

We have seen how the inability to access education can lead to further displacement. Many refugee children and youth have told us that they moved onward from their host countries, often at substantial risk to their lives, in search of education and a more promising future. One of the first Syrian refugees we helped resettle after the start of the conflict was a nine-year-old boy who told us how he joined a group of refugees in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean in an unseaworthy boat so that he could go to school.

Although access to early childhood and primary education – especially in large-scale emergencies – did notably improve in 2014, access to secondary education remained a critical gap. We saw a positive breakthrough, however, at the World Education Forum held in Incheon in May this year, where Ministers

¹¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Age, Gender and Diversity - UNHCR Accountability Report 2014*, 15 July 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55a61f794.html>.

of Education from around the world acknowledged, in a Declaration, for the first time the right of all children on a State's territory, including refugees and IDPs, to access national education systems. I hope that this Declaration will soon translate into concrete follow-up.

In recognition of the talents and aspirations of refugee, IDP, and stateless youth, UNHCR has developed the Youth Initiative Fund, which supports projects initiated by youth in 15 countries. We are now engaging in consultations with youth around the world in the lead-up to the NGO Consultations, which next year will focus on youth.

Finding solutions

Against this background, a compelling case is made for the search for solutions for refugees, IDPs, and stateless persons, including beyond the three traditional ones. Achieving solutions is not a static end state but indeed a pathway towards the realisation of rights, starting already in the emergency phase. This necessarily entails for our operations a detailed examination of each context, benchmarks for measuring progress, timelines for disengagement, and working in a multi-year mode. We are encouraged by last week's Ministerial Meeting on Comprehensive Solutions Strategies for Rwandan Refugees and hope that this process will get support from the international community and be concluded successfully within a two-year timeframe.

Finding solutions to forced displacement not only can resolve current situations, but also help to prevent future ones, particularly in relation to dangerous onward movements. Granting the right to work in host countries or resolving statelessness could, for example, obviate the need to move in search of protection and livelihoods. Safe pathways to solutions in third countries could also provide viable alternatives. For example, labour mobility schemes, expanded opportunities for family reunification, increased resettlement quotas, humanitarian admission and visa programmes, and student visas and scholarships could effectively address many of the specific needs of refugees, IDPs, and stateless persons.

The potential to capitalise upon labour opportunities offers one of the most promising areas for solutions. A stronger focus on labour mobility and the right to work can help ensure that refugees and IDPs are able to get on with their lives. While refugees have long worked in informal economies around the world, recognising and facilitating their right to work enables them to pursue livelihoods with dignity.

Creating legal employment and livelihood opportunities could further be linked to development programmes to ensure that they benefit refugee and host communities alike, for example through improved labour standards and labour mobility schemes. In so doing, we could work within the ILO framework to develop tripartite initiatives towards these goals. This would be an opportunity for us to address fears about competition for labour and employment. It would demonstrate both how refugees and IDPs make positive contributions to economies when they have the opportunity to work and not remain dependent on assistance, and also show how they can fill critical shortages and gaps in the labour market.

Family unity is another area where solutions could easily be within reach if only there were the political will and an enabling legal environment. The right to family unity cuts across all aspects of the displacement cycle, from prevention, to protection, to solutions. The research has shown that refugees integrate better, wherever they are, when they have the social, economic, and psychological support of their family members. Recent legislation making family reunification more difficult to access in a number of industrialised States ultimately undermines potential for social and economic integration. It is necessary to provide safe, facilitated, and expedited pathways for refugees to reunite with their family members so they do not have to resort to smugglers or other unsafe means to reach them.

Resettlement remains an important solution, offering refugees an opportunity to start a new phase of their lives. When offered in significant numbers, resettlement is also an expression of responsibility-sharing. With the rising refugee population and multiplication of emergencies, it is no surprise that

resettlement needs have increased by 50 per cent over the past three years.¹² However, global resettlement needs continue to outstrip resettlement places on offer. Despite some recent increases in quotas made available by States, an average of only one in ten refugees with resettlement needs will actually get a chance to be resettled.

Nonetheless, there have been some positive developments in meeting these growing needs. For example, we have been able to double the number of refugees resettled out of Africa over the past three years. At the same time, we also need to turn our attention to durable solutions and livelihoods for the vast majority of refugees who remain in Africa. Most have been living in camps in protracted situations for some 20 years or more [for example, Somali, Congolese (DRC), and Eritrean refugees] where they have very limited livelihood opportunities.

Moreover, as the Syrian situation becomes more protracted, resettlement and other forms of admission remain a critical part of the international community's response. We welcome recent commitments that have helped us reach our initial goal of securing 130,000 places for Syrian refugees by 2016. It is time now to mobilise ourselves to meet the longer-term objective of providing resettlement and other forms of admission for the ten per cent of Syrian refugees estimated to have resettlement needs.

Related to solutions, in November we will mark the first anniversary of our decade-long Global Campaign to End Statelessness. There is no doubt in our mind that this has been a major undertaking. It is an opportunity for the international community to bring an end to this human-made predicament. The countdown has started, and we need to accelerate collective efforts to make ending statelessness a reality.

We have made some progress. Since the launch of the Campaign, six countries acceded to either or both statelessness instruments,¹³ and four countries concluded legal reforms of nationality laws.¹⁴ In addition, some 37,100 formerly stateless persons acquired nationality in 2014. In the Asia and the Pacific region, 44 States agreed to support universal civil registration and endorsed a Regional Action Framework recognising the vital role of birth registration in preventing statelessness. We now also have more than 55,000 signatures to the Open Letter to end statelessness.

At the same time, we have seen new risks of statelessness emerge, including instances of arbitrary deprivation of nationality. In addition to the situation in Myanmar where highly controversial race and religion laws have recently been adopted, of particular concern are the 142,000 Syrian refugee children born in exile since 2011 who are at risk of statelessness for various reasons. They may be separated from their families. Their fathers, through whom they obtain nationality under the laws of many host countries in the region, may be missing or deceased. They may fall prey to criminal networks engaging in trafficking or illegal adoption. They may lack documentation or fall into gaps in nationality laws. Civil registries that provide documentation are often inaccessible, no longer functioning, or destroyed in conflict-affected areas. Refugees often also face difficulties in registering new marriages and births in countries of asylum. In cooperation with partners and host Governments, UNHCR has taken a range of steps to ensure every Syrian refugee child begins life with a birth certificate. Public education, legal aid and counselling, and mobile birth registration services, for example, have led to significant increases in birth registration, particularly in Jordan and Egypt.

¹² Resettlement submission categories include Survivors of Violence and/or Torture; Women and Girls at Risk; Children and Adolescents at Risk; Medical Needs; Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs; Family Reunification; and Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions. UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a2ccf4c6.html>

¹³ Belize, 1961 Convention, 14 August 2015; Turkey, 1954 Convention, 26 March 2015; El Salvador, 1954 Convention, 9 February 2015; Peru, 1961 Convention, 18 December 2014; Argentina, 1961 Convention, 13 November 2014; and Niger, 1954 Convention, 7 November 2014.

¹⁴ Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)), Estonia, Armenia (amendments to the Law on Non-Contentious Proceedings which introduce cost-free judicial procedures for late birth registration of individuals born outside the formal healthcare system), and Montenegro.

Yet this is only a starting point. We need to accelerate efforts to make ending statelessness for all a reality. We are analysing the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals from the perspective of resolving statelessness and will issue guidance. We are reviewing the Action Plan to operationalise further the steps necessary to make a difference. Later this year, we will launch a Special Report on the impact of statelessness on children and youth.

A new vision of solutions would be incomplete without addressing the causes of displacement. The international community started to do this in the 1980s and 1990s when discussions began more systematically on how to avert new refugee situations by addressing the drivers of displacement. We saw, for instance, the Canadian Human Rights Commission initiative, which focused on strengthening the international human rights machinery, as well as the German initiative for Peace and Security. Also during that time, a panel of Government experts strategised how to make fuller use of the UN's competencies under its Charter, which ultimately led to the development of early warning mechanisms and the Responsibility to Protect concept.

It is timely for us to revisit these discussions and think about how we can bridge protection efforts and longer-term prevention and solutions by addressing the roots of displacement. As the High Commissioner noted, key drivers are, of course, the political crises that are well beyond the remit of humanitarian and protection organisations to address. In the face of political impasse, however, the focus has often been deflected to the humanitarian response.

Yet there are things we can achieve within our respective mandates. We can contribute to preventive action, for example, through conflict mediation and minority protection, building upon our work on the rule of law, social cohesion, peacebuilding, human rights, and rights-based approaches to development. It is an opportune moment to bolster current initiatives to address statelessness, empower women, promote the right to work, facilitate birth registration, and ensure access to education. More could perhaps be done to help expose the link between the small arms trade and violence, and shed light on the displacement impact of those extraction industries that operate in environments rife with violence and impunity. We can further take stock of lessons learned from previous initiatives – such as the Kimberly Process dealing with blood diamonds, or the prevention of harm by landmines – and use these to help chart the way forward. Understanding and addressing root causes of displacement is therefore the theme of this year's High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, and we look forward to your ideas and engagement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we need an all-out effort to ensure that protection – and in particular, the institution of asylum – remains life-saving, non-political, and fundamentally humanitarian. Today's problems desperately require a depoliticised space in which we can get on with practicalities, such as shelter, necessities of life, or determination of status. We must call upon our shared humanity, histories, and sacred traditions of providing refuge to persons fleeing conflict and persecution, and remember that it was exactly for times like these that the international refugee protection regime was created. Let us recognise the reality of human displacement, remain true to the rule of law, and acknowledge the positive contributions that refugees and migrants make to our societies.

It is in this spirit that we can look at the current situation not as a "crisis", but an opportunity and a call to action. As the Preamble to the 1951 Refugee Convention aptly reminds us, "...the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries, and...a satisfactory solution of a problem of which the United Nations has recognized the international scope and nature cannot therefore be achieved without international co-operation." This speaks to the most critical protection gap we are facing today – the need for a global compact on predictable and equitable burden and responsibility-sharing. In a world in turmoil, we need a sense of equanimity, purpose, and trust to make such a global compact a reality.

Thank you.