



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

As delivered

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Madam Chairperson, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I address you today, more people have been forced to flee their homes than at any time since the Rwandan genocide. If refugees and internally displaced persons were a nation, they would make up one of the world's thirty biggest countries.

But they are not a nation. They have lost their homes, their livelihoods, their plans for the future, and far too many of them have lost what they held dearest – their families.

This year alone, over 1.5 million refugees have left Syria, and hundreds of thousands fled their country across Africa – from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Mali, and Somalia.

I began my remarks at the last EXCOM with a description of multiple emergencies and the massive displacement they had caused. Today, not only are we still facing most of these same crises, but in addition, we are now confronted with the huge refugee outflow caused by the tragedy in Syria.

UNHCR and its partners are doing everything possible to respond, but we are stretched to the limits by this combination of an emergency unparalleled in the recent past, and the persistence of other crises around the world.

In 2012 and 2013, we deployed over 840 people on emergency missions across the globe. Just last year, some 130 airlifts delivered over 12,000 tons of emergency relief items – roughly four times as much as in 2010. Supplementary appeals to respond to new emergencies and other unforeseen needs amounted to nearly 700 million USD in 2012 and 1.4 billion USD so far in 2013. This is an immense effort, but not nearly enough to address all the needs of the people we care for.

As these multiple strains on our delivery capacity are growing from year to year, even with the investments we have made in the past, there continue to be shortcomings. I sometimes ask myself how it has been possible for UNHCR and our partners to provide protection and assistance to so many people in this context, despite all the existing difficulties and gaps, and despite the enormous stress we are under.

I want to underline six factors that have helped us to do this. They will remain central to our ability to deliver as we continue to face unresolved displacement situations and new and unpredictable crises.

The first element, and indeed the single most important factor in ensuring the effective protection of refugees, is the generosity of **host countries and local communities**. Most governments affected by recent new displacement have allowed refugees to find safety. Many have provided them with shelter, access to schools and health care, and even in some cases the permission to work.

The burden of hosting refugees is distributed unevenly across the world, and that gap is widening. More than 80% of today's refugees are hosted by developing countries, compared to 70% a decade ago. Sustaining the international refugee protection system will require enhanced support to host countries, and a more serious effort by the international community for burden and responsibility-sharing. What we discussed yesterday and today to be true for the Syria crisis is just as true for the rest of the world.

The second factor in allowing us to respond has been the **strong financial support from donors**. While there are still significant shortfalls, funding has reached unprecedented levels. In 2012, UNHCR received 2.3 billion US dollars in voluntary contributions – a record which will be surpassed - and largely surpassed – in 2013. Support from the private sector is growing steadily – from 21.7 million USD in 2006 to an expected 170 million USD this year.

I am particularly grateful for the openness and willingness of our supporters to provide us with early indications of funding levels. An organization that is 98 per cent voluntarily funded depends on clear and reliable information about the resources it will have available, so as to plan and respond quickly and effectively.

Achieving a balance between the demands of the Syria crisis and humanitarian needs elsewhere remains a major challenge. I commend those countries that have made efforts to use additional budget sources to fund the Syria crisis, so as to minimize the negative impact on other operations. Nonetheless, several regions – especially Africa – are struggling with a decrease in funding levels.

The third crucial factor in our response is **partnership**. UNHCR has invested a lot in reinforcing its long-standing partnerships, forging new ones and providing better support to its partners, both in refugee emergencies and in cluster situations.

We have opened up new avenues in our cooperation with the World Food Programme, focusing on cash and voucher-based assistance, and aiming at reorienting refugee food aid in a way that increases self-reliance and impacts positively on local economies. With UNICEF, we are working to strengthen our partnership on education, child protection and water/sanitation at the country level. In addition, I am extremely happy about the cooperation taking place with UNDP and the World Bank in the countries neighboring Syria as highlighted in the debate yesterday and this morning.

We are also following up on our Structured Dialogue with NGO partners and the Red Cross and Red Crescent family. Guidance is being developed for field operations to improve joint planning, information-sharing and advocacy, as well as the collaboration in urban settings and capacity-building of local actors.

UNHCR remains firmly committed to the field implementation of the Transformative Agenda, in close cooperation with OCHA and partners in the Inter Agency Standing Committee. Adjustments made to our own procedures in this context have also provided an opportunity to review and improve our leadership approaches and coordination mechanisms for refugee operations and to better support to our partners.

The enormous needs created by the Syria crisis are a testing ground for many of these measures. One example is the Regional Response Plan for Syrian refugees, which is based on broad consultations and joint prioritization with 84 partners and host governments. A real-time evaluation of the Syria response carried out with NGOs was key in identifying progress made so far and recommendations for the way forward. The debates at the High Level Segment showed how important it is to merge the humanitarian and development tracks into a comprehensive approach which benefits both refugees and the communities hosting them.

The fourth element that has enabled us to deliver strongly is linked to the **results of our own internal reform process** over the past 7 years. Between 2006 and 2012, Headquarters costs dropped from nearly 14% to 8% of overall expenditure, including Budapest, while staff costs reduced from 41% to 26% within the same period. Since 2006, our operations have more than doubled in size, but we only have 13% more staff globally, and 32% fewer in Geneva.

Through this clear reduction in relative structural costs, we are now able to direct significantly more resources to protection, assistance and solutions for people of concern, with a very strong increase in productivity. We spend two and a half times as much through our partners, and have more than tripled the volume of activities implemented by national organizations, which also increases our contribution to the development of civil society in the countries we work in. In 2012, nearly all unearmarked funding was used in the field and only 3% in Headquarters, which

provided vital flexibility to ensure uninterrupted programme delivery also for forgotten protracted and emergency situations.

All this has helped to improve delivery where it counts most – in the field. Through better deployment mechanisms and more efficient global supply management, we have increased our 72-hour emergency response capacity from 250,000 to 600,000 beneficiaries since 2006. With protection recognized as the core of everything we do, there are now one and a half times as many protection staff across the globe as seven years ago.

We are also working hard to modernize our human resource management – a particularly difficult challenge. Fast-track assignments in emergency operations have been sped up significantly, and new recruitment programmes were launched for entry-level personnel as well as specialist expertise. The Global Learning Center that was established in Budapest administered over 9,000 individual learning activities to UNHCR staff, affiliate workforce and external partners last year – one and a half times as many as in 2011.

The fifth aspect of our response strategy, and one we are intending to grow significantly in the coming years, is **innovation**. This is a crucial tool to do more with less, as “business as usual” practices are becoming unsustainable. UNHCR now has innovation teams based in Geneva, Bangkok and Nairobi, to take advantage of opportunities offered by the private sector and the creativity of staff and refugees themselves.

Current projects focus on shelter, energy, communications technology and education, as well as self-reliance. They include an innovative transitional housing unit developed with the IKEA Foundation and being field-tested in Ethiopia and Iraq; exploring assistance tracking tools with UPS; and the Community Technology Access project that now offers online education and livelihood opportunities for refugees through internet work and mobile payment. And we have started to collect more proposals through a crowd-sourced platform called UNHCR Ideas that has met with a very enthusiastic response from staff, partners and refugees.

Finally, none of the recent achievements would have been possible without the dedication and professionalism of **UNHCR staff**, despite the difficult conditions we work under. 40% of our staff, including nearly one in three internationals, serve in non-family duty stations, many of them in highly insecure environments. This is a very high percentage even for the UN system. Nearly every year we mourn lives lost in the line of duty – 43 in total since UNHCR was established. Almost half of these deaths occurred since the beginning of this new century, as humanitarian action becomes a more and more dangerous business.

Ours has never been an easy organization to work for. That is why I am so proud and grateful for the energy, the passion and the deep commitment which our staff – and their families – bring to UNHCR, year after year, emergency after emergency.

Excellencies,

As forced displacement is on the rise, I am particularly worried about what we call globalized refugee populations, which see the same community spread across dozens of countries around the world. These tend to be among the most protracted situations of exile.

The most visible of these global refugee populations are Afghans and Somalis. Many of them have been displaced for two decades or even longer. In some families, only the grandparents have seen their home country. Nonetheless, for many of these refugees, the return home remains a dream they one day hope to fulfill, once it becomes safe.

Even though some 5.7 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country since 2002, there were still over 2.6 million spread across 82 countries at the end of last year. Most of them remain in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees launched in 2012 includes the governments of these two countries, as well as Afghanistan and UNHCR. It centers on sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, including through joint work with the Government, UNDP, ILO and other partners. The Strategy also foresees support to host communities, such as through the RAHA programme in Pakistan, and alternative stay arrangements in asylum countries. Strong international support for all aspects of this strategy, in particular inside Afghanistan, is crucial, also in view of the significant political and security transitions facing the country in 2014.

Meanwhile, both Pakistan and Iran continue to provide generous protection to the remaining Afghan refugees. I am grateful to the Government of Pakistan for its recent endorsement of a forward-looking policy for the management of Afghan refugees, which includes the extension of the Proof of Registration cards until the end of 2015. Similarly, the Government of Iran is to be commended for its progressive policy of ensuring that all refugee children attend school and that refugees have access to work permits and a far-reaching health insurance scheme.

The second global refugee population, the Somalis, has an even larger geographic extension than the Afghans. More than 1.1 million Somali refugees are currently registered in 109 countries. Kenya hosts by far the largest number – about half a million – followed by Ethiopia with some 245,000. Yemen, Djibouti and Uganda also have large Somali refugee populations.

There has been encouraging progress in Somalia recently, which has prompted the spontaneous return of thousands of internally displaced persons, diaspora Somalis, and refugees. However, many key areas of return, especially in South and Central Somalia, remain fundamentally insecure and inaccessible, and indeed many Somalis are still forced to seek safety elsewhere, including nearly 58,000 new internally displaced persons and over 20,000 new refugee arrivals in 2013 alone.

Responding to the opportunities and remaining challenges which Somalia offers today will require a carefully differentiated approach that combines a constructive focus on solutions with assurances for continued asylum and protection for those who still need it. Within this process, the attention needs to remain centered on creating the conditions inside Somalia for voluntary, safe and sustainable return. Meanwhile, mechanisms for preparing a future voluntary repatriation are being put in place, and UNHCR will give more systematic support to spontaneous returns.

In this context, we will work with Somalia and major host countries for the success of a Global Initiative for Somali Refugees.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to briefly highlight some of the key challenges and trends in protection during this past year.

First, the risks and dangers faced by refugees, asylum seekers and others travelling in mixed migratory flows continue to be of major concern. These persons are often forced to rely on the services of smugglers, exposing them to harassment and exploitation, beatings, the risk of trafficking, or even death.

One of the most harrowing examples is the high incidence of kidnapping and trafficking of mainly Eritrean asylum-seekers and migrants in eastern Sudan and along the route through Egypt to Israel and Europe. Many of them, including a disturbingly high number of unaccompanied children, are held for ransom or sold to criminal gangs, being trafficked into slavery-like practices and heavily abused or even killed for illegal organ transplants. IOM and UNHCR have launched a regional project to help the Sudanese authorities address smuggling and trafficking in the east of the country. But that is just a drop in the ocean, and more needs to be done to enhance international cooperation on this issue to be more effective in cracking down

on traffickers and smugglers, and more humane in responding to the needs of the victims.

Elsewhere in the world, we have also been concerned about the dramatic increase in irregular maritime movements, especially in the Asia Pacific region. Hundreds of lives have been lost at sea, including many refugees and asylum seekers. This highlights the urgent need for an innovative approach in the way mixed flows are addressed through coordinated, protection-minded regional responses. Indeed, what we need is a pact of solidarity, based on burden-sharing and common but differentiated responsibilities of the affected States.

Second, the institution of asylum is under increasing pressure. It is particularly distressing that this is also true in some countries in the developed world. Refugees and asylum seekers often find it difficult to access safety, hampered by border management policies which lack the required safeguards for people in need of international protection. Substandard reception arrangements, the disproportionate use of detention including as a deterrent to future arrivals, and the absence of adequate burden-sharing arrangements among states are our main concerns. In addition, not all states are doing enough to fight intolerance, racism and racially-motivated violence, which pose serious risks to the safety of refugees and other foreigners.

A third major focus of our protection work continues to be the prevention of and response to sexual and gender based violence. Since our updated SGBV Strategy was launched in 2011, twenty operations have developed and implemented country-specific strategies adapted to their local context and also focusing on risks to specific groups such as persons with disabilities, or widespread but unreported phenomena like survival sex. In 2013, we have strongly invested in our SGBV response, especially in emergencies, notably in Syria and Mali.

A number of special SGBV projects launched in 2012 have helped to expand existing services for survivors and supported critical investments, like the establishment of safe houses, in a dozen operations across the world. The projects have strengthened measures ranging from psychosocial support and legal counseling to self-defense training and access to livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities. Institutionally, we are placing particular emphasis on improving knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation as well as SGBV data management, to help strengthen our response.

On a broader level, I strongly welcome the renewed international focus on this issue, including through the UK initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict and a new project by the US State Department focusing on SGBV prevention in emergencies.

Fourth is statelessness, an issue we have been fighting hard to keep on the international agenda since the 2011 Ministerial meeting. Encouraging progress has been made since then, including 29 accessions to the two statelessness conventions.

The past twelve months have also seen significant nationality law reforms initiated in Côte d'Ivoire, the Russian Federation, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

Next year's 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention is an opportunity to focus on the everyday impact of statelessness on the people it afflicts. To understand why it is so important to resolve protracted statelessness situations, we only need to look at the dire predicament of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The desperation created by decades of statelessness, coupled with recent violence and displacement, is driving more and more of them to leave the country. There has been an alarming increase in the number of people making perilous boat journeys to other countries. In the first eight months of this year alone, over 400 Rohingya lost their lives doing so – a tragic example of the human cost of statelessness.

Distinguished Delegates, the eradication of statelessness within a decade is an ambitious goal. But it is one I believe we should be able to reach together.

Finally, let me say a few words on the protection of internally displaced persons. Fifteen years after the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were established, there is a risk that protection and durable solutions for the internally displaced are not receiving the international attention they deserve. Enormous efforts have been made in recent years to strengthen the cluster system and the tools it makes available to those working with internally displaced people. Nevertheless, humanitarian actors like UNHCR find it increasingly difficult to mobilize funding for these operations, as institutional focus on internal displacement has dwindled, both within the UN and the international community.

This is one of the reasons why our 2013 Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December will look at persistent gaps and possible solutions for the protection of internally displaced persons. I hope many of you gathered here today will also be able to add your perspective to that discussion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let there be no mistake – asylum, especially protracted asylum, is very often an ordeal for those who are obliged to seek it, and we must continue doing whatever we can to make life in exile more bearable.

With more than half of all refugees living in urban areas today, UNHCR is increasingly working with partners, national institutions and community-based organizations to explore new opportunities in responding to displacement in out-of-

camp settings. As I have often said, anyone who thinks refugee camps are a good idea has never lived in one.

But this also means we need new approaches to outreach and communication with refugees, and more support to host communities and existing services. We must ensure that problems do not simply become invisible in urban areas, and strengthen local resources that often already fall short of meeting the needs of the host population.

Part of the answer is to pursue more integrated approaches that anchor the refugee response within the broader framework of national and local development efforts. The idea is not to divert scarce development resources to the refugee response or to use even more limited humanitarian funding to promote development objectives, but rather to achieve alignment, complementarity and synergies between the two.

We are also expanding the use of cash-based interventions in UNHCR. This gives refugees the dignity of choice and a greater sense of normalcy in their lives, allowing them to address their key needs. Cash assistance stimulates the local economy and allows people to see refugees as more than just a burden. It also profoundly transforms the way we deliver humanitarian programmes, and we will work closely with our partners to adapt the way we assess needs, design projects and monitor results.

Excellencies,

Finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced people remains the ultimate goal of UNHCR's work, and its biggest challenge. Last year, the number of new refugees again exceeded that of people who were able to leave displacement. This only underlines the urgency of reinvigorating the way we look at solutions, at the country level, regionally and institutionally.

There are some encouraging examples. In Nepal, more than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan have been referred for resettlement since 2007, a major milestone in resolving one of the most protracted situations in Asia. I already mentioned the important efforts being made in relation to the Afghan Refugees in South-West Asia.

There has also been good progress in Africa since 2012. Comprehensive strategies for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees have helped over 300,000 to return home and prepared the way for the local integration of many others.

In the Balkans, governments, development actors and UNHCR are working with donors and regional institutions to close the refugee chapter of the 1990s. In the

Americas, the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration in 2014 will also focus on innovative strategies for comprehensive solutions.

In several regions, the use of legal migratory frameworks could offer refugees in protracted situations and without proper status an alternative path if traditional durable solutions are unavailable.

Many of UNHCR's partnership efforts are also increasingly geared towards facilitating solutions, such as the Transitional Solutions Initiative with UNDP and other partners. These efforts often center on helping refugees become self-reliant, and on reducing the risk of prolonged aid dependency. I want to express my appreciation to the Government of Sudan for its decision last week to grant 30,000 work permits to refugees in Kassala State.

A focus on solutions is needed from the beginning of any displacement crisis. Resource constraints often hamper these efforts, but we must turn this dynamic around and recognize solutions-oriented approaches for what they are: not only an investment in people, but indeed a better use of scarce funding than measures that perpetuate long-term aid dependency.

Excellencies,

The principle of giving refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution is a universal value. At its core, it is not the product of modern civilization, much less an invention after the Second World War. As last year's Dialogue on Protection Challenges confirmed, this principle is deeply rooted in all of the world's major religions and runs through all cultures. Throughout human memory, people everywhere have sheltered strangers who desperately needed their help. Then and now, many of them have done so at enormous cost to themselves, often for years on end.

Let us stand together to protect this fundamental human value, for the millions of people around the world who depend on it. And let us join our efforts to make sure that those who help them are supported in doing so.

Thank you very much.