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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**Remarks to THE 65TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
Geneva, 1 October 2014
AS DELIVERED**

Your Excellency Ambassador Choi Seokyoung, Chairperson of the Executive Committee and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations in Geneva,
Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. Thank you for your welcome and invitation. I am honoured to be the first Secretary-General to address the Executive Committee in almost 10 years.

Over the years, UNHCR has been bestowed with the Nobel Peace Prize -- not once, but twice. Today, you are at the centre of action and assistance for tens of millions of people in need.

I wish to pay a special tribute to the many humanitarian workers around the world who risk their lives each day to help people in need.

The commitment and passion of UNHCR is reflected in the vision and principled leadership of High Commissioner António Guterres.

And I thank the High Commissioner for your decade of delivering for UNHCR and the people it serves. I really thank you and highly commend your leadership.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is my first trip after a two-week very hectic General Debate in the United Nations.

For the past two weeks, I have met a succession of world leaders. We have had many high-level meetings focused on hotspots around the world.

The agenda is always full. The meetings are always rushed.

But there is perhaps no better place to get a snapshot of the state of the world.

I am sorry to tell you, it is not a pretty picture.

We are living in a world of many troubles. Crises are mounting. Our planet is warming. And diseases are spreading.

In my annual address to the General Assembly, I highlighted a fact that you know only too well.

Never before in United Nations history have we had so many refugees, displaced people and asylum seekers.

Never before has the United Nations been asked to reach so many with emergency food assistance and other life-saving support.

Some of the challenges are on the front pages. Others are far from the headlines.

We are troubled by and suffering from many natural calamities but most of the crises we are seeing are man-made.

In Iraq and Syria, we see new depths of barbarity with each passing day, and devastating spill-over effects across the region.

And as you highlighted this week, the continent of Africa is home to millions of refugees and internally displaced -- including more than two million people forced to leave their homes this year alone.

This includes people fleeing from war and civil strife from the Central African Republic to northern Nigeria ... from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel.

I thank the Executive Committee for putting the spotlight on crises that too often remain in the shadows.

The world must do more to prevent forced displacement, address its root causes, and support solutions for those affected by it. This requires greater resources and more political leadership.

It also requires unprecedented cooperation by the international community. I have been pleased to see us pull more closely together through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Transformative Agenda.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Across the landscape of displacement crises, there is a need for an earlier and greater focus on human rights.

The Human Rights Up Front initiative which I launched last year aims to place human rights at the centre of our thinking and our efforts in the field.

UNHCR has been a strong supporter from day one.

It helped craft the Action Plan and is assisting with implementation worldwide.

With its leadership on protection, UNHCR has provided important expertise in the

context of humanitarian settings and ongoing conflict situations.

With its culture of protection, UNHCR serves as a model for the wider system.

Human Rights up Front is essentially about an attitude – about speaking up and doing what is right.

The protection of nearly 100,000 people at UN bases throughout South Sudan has been an early milestone of this new approach.

When the crisis happened in South Sudan tens of thousands of people were rushing into the United Nations compound.

You may remember 20 years ago, what that happened and all those people who sought safety in a United Nations mission, we let them go out, we released them from the mission. As soon as they were released from the United Nations compound they were all murdered, brutally.

This time I gave instructions, in all cases, whoever was coming to the United Nations, bring them and protect them.

We have more than one hundred thousand people. United Nations missions are not designed, are not equipped to accommodate hundreds of thousands of people. It's a huge challenge.

But without that open gate policy, I'm afraid to tell you that many thousands of people would have died.

That is what we call Human Rights Up Front – human rights should be put at the centre and at the front when dealing with refugees and asylum seekers.

Of course, those men, women and children are still there. We must ensure they remain protected while at the same time finding them a durable solution.

Securing durable solutions for internally displaced persons and refugees is a joint responsibility and one that needs to be undertaken progressively.

We have learned many lessons in the field. Now we must use what we have learned to bring together more actors to achieve common commitments.

The new Solutions Alliance is an important platform to do just that.

We know that planning for solutions must start early – in fact, during the emergency phase.

After all, unresolved displacement can upend a country's path to peace and prosperity.

That is why the needs and potential of displaced populations must be reflected in national development plans and based on joint analysis.

The displacement challenge also remains an important issue for consideration as Member States of the United Nations continue discussions to formulate the post-2015 development agenda.

What I'd like to tell you is that refugees may be a humanitarian issue, it starts as

a humanitarian issue, but it has a direct relationship with development issues. There should be no separation between humanitarian and development – it's all a part of development issues.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know that your deliberations during this Executive Committee session have also focused on the challenge of statelessness.

Everyone has the right to belong, the right to a nationality. But millions worldwide are still denied that right.

I welcome UNHCR's plans to launch a global campaign to end statelessness in the next decade. I call on all States to support it.

The coming years must be a time for concrete action – for changing nationality laws, resolving the plight of stateless people and ensuring no child is born without citizenship.

Statelessness, like many other human rights violations, is often rooted in discriminatory beliefs and practices.

Let us stand together against all forms of racism, xenophobia and manipulation that engender hatred, exclusion and discrimination.

And let us speak up when people are stripped of their nationality.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As we look ahead and prepare for the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 in Istanbul, we must ask how we can ensure the humanitarian system is fit for purpose.

The focus must stay fixed on the people affected by crises and our ability to deliver the protection and relief they need.

We must find ways to be more inclusive of new humanitarian actors.

And we must reaffirm the universality of humanitarian principles which, when respected, protect both the victims and those who come to their rescue.

We simply cannot accept the erosion of these fundamental principles – anywhere, at any time, for any reason.

Finally, allow me to share a personal reason why I am so committed to your mission.

I understand something about the hardships that refugees and other displaced persons face for a simple reason: I was one of them, I was myself one of the displaced persons during the Korean war.

When the Korean war ravaged my country as a child, my family had to run for our lives.

One of my earliest memories is fleeing with my family into the hills surrounding my village.

As we climbed in the rain and cold, I looked back on the only world I knew.

Where I had played – where I had gone to school – where I had lived with my family – all of it was in flames.

Our lives went up in smoke.

The United Nations and the international community rushed to help. They nourished us. They provided text-books and pens. They helped us rebuild and gave us the power to hope again.

That is why when I go to refugee camps around the world – I carry a simple message.

“The world is with you, the United Nations is with you, do not despair, I am with you.”

I travelled, I visited many refugee camps, Syrian refugee camps, and I was very much humbled to see them: their life was miserable in refugee camps, but I was encouraged when I saw many children. They were studying in classrooms, but these classrooms were old, makeshift classrooms, temporary.

I told them that: “Your situation is better than mine was, sixty years ago. At that time we didn’t have even classrooms, we didn’t have text-books... but the United Nations is with you!”

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, all are now taking care of all these people.

Of course it may be very difficult. We have 51 million refugees around the world. We have more than 3 million Syrian refugees. So I have been trying to give them a sense of hope.

To all of them the United Nations is a beacon of hope. As to me, to many Korean children at that time including myself, the United Nations was the beacon, the beacon of hope.

And despite all these hardships, despite the darkness, I came through.

And I am telling them: “You will also come through these difficulties, too. So do not despair.”

That has been my consistent message to many people in refugee camps, and many developing countries, particularly in Africa.

That is what happens when the world works together.

That is what happens when humanitarian organizations like the UNHCR are on the scene.

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for this opportunity, for your

strong commitment to humanity.

Thank you even more for rebuilding shattered lives and building a better world for all.

Thank you very much for your leadership, thank you.