

## **Chairperson's summary of the general debate**

**4 October 2018**

I would like to thank you for the thoughtful and substantive debate over the past few days. 135 delegations took the floor in the last couple of days to express support for the refugee cause and for the work of UNHCR. This is a good sign, and we need to keep this momentum going. Together, we have touched upon many important issues, and I will attempt to summarize some of the highlights.

Let me start with the High Commissioner's opening remarks, in which he noted with concern that poverty, exclusion and the growing impact of climate change has led to the escalation of conflicts and the intensification of crises. He expressed concern about the lack of political will to counter the loud voices of division that allow discrimination, racism and xenophobia to flourish.

But at the same time, he conveyed hope that the global compact on refugees will be a rallying point for solidarity and a victory

for multilateralism. In this regard, the High Commissioner urged delegations to welcome and strongly endorse the global compact on refugees, underscoring the principle of international cooperation.

The High Commissioner recalled the five core strategic directions that guide UNHCR's work: protecting; responding in emergencies; promoting inclusion and self-reliance; empowering the people UNHCR serves; and pursuing solutions. Taking into consideration our discussions, I will now group the various comments and suggestions made under these directions.

### **(Protect)**

Under the theme of **Protection**, you emphasized its “centrality” and stressed that the principles of cooperation and solidarity are at the core of the international protection regime. You noted that hosting refugees is a moral obligation, as well as a legal obligation, in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and relevant regional instruments. Keeping borders open to people forced to flee their homes lies at the heart of protection,

and you paid tribute to countries which have generously done so – in particular to those countries with limited resources where the notion of hospitality is respected. The right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement were highlighted, and you welcomed the emphasis placed on this in the global compact on refugees.

Numerous delegations remarked on the increasingly **mixed nature of population flows** and the challenges this can present. You noted that response measures should be guided by respect for fundamental rights and underlined the need to ensure protection for the most vulnerable, in particular unaccompanied minors, women and children. In this context, you stressed the need to combat violence, exploitation and trafficking, and encouraged States to find alternatives to detention. You also emphasized the importance of addressing the situation of refugees with special needs, including victims of **sexual and gender-based violence** and people living with disabilities.

We heard commitments by many of you to end **statelessness** by 2024 and examples of legislative and operational advancements to support such efforts. In his opening remarks,

the High Commissioner announced that there will be a high-level event on statelessness at the next plenary session of the Executive Committee, and I encourage you to continue making progress towards the campaign's goals and to start looking at the kind of concrete pledges that can be made to help UNHCR work towards the eradication of statelessness.

**Internal displacement** remained a major concern for many of you. With the number of IDPs now standing at over 40 million, you noted that the commitment to “leave no one behind” must include action to support them. In this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the “Guiding principles on internal displacement”, we cannot lose out on the opportunity to address this challenge with greater enthusiasm.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

**(Respond)**

Under the theme of **Responding to emergencies**, you took good note of UNHCR's efforts to address the vast humanitarian needs around the world and praised the efforts of the dedicated aid workers on the front lines. Many of you also reminded us

of the need to continue to protect and assist people in **protracted situations**.

The dire situation of refugees and migrants in **Libya** and travelling along **the Central Mediterranean route** was a cause of great concern. You noted the efforts of UNHCR in addressing the situation, and Niger was applauded for supporting this through the establishment of an evacuation mechanism. Appreciation was also expressed for coordination with the International Organization for Migration on this issue. Many also pointed out that the principle of rescue at sea, regardless of race or nationality, must be upheld if we are to restore our common humanity.

You also mentioned that, “I am what I am, because of who we all are”.

You noted **the shortage of funding**, in particular for the African continent, and voiced concern that the **continued unpredictability and earmarking of much funding** impacts on the provision of life-saving assistance and services to the displaced.

(Include and empower)

Under the inter-related themes of **Promoting inclusion and empowering the people that UNHCR serves**, you strongly welcomed UNHCR's engagement with development actors in order to realize the kind of comprehensive responses envisioned in the global compact on refugees. It was noted that developing countries continue to host 85 per cent of the world's refugee population. As one delegation said, "these countries are essentially providing a global public good and have the right to expect support from the international community". In this context, collaboration between UNHCR and the World Bank, in addition to other development actors, gives hope that more comprehensive responses can become the norm.

Many echoed the message of the keynote speaker, the Chief Executive Officer of the **World Bank**, Kristalina Georgieva, that addressing forced displacement is now an important part of the development agenda. As she said, we are witnessing a "seismic shift" in the way we approach humanitarian

emergencies and that we have finally succeeded in bringing the two worlds – the humanitarian and development– together.

You encouraged States to consider measures to include and empower refugees from the outset of emergencies. This consists of their inclusion in national health and education systems, as well as initiatives aimed at fostering greater self-reliance, especially through access to labour markets, enabling them to also contribute to the communities in which they live. In this context, the important role of the private sector – not just as donors but as strategic partners – was underscored. Civil society was also highlighted as essential in supporting refugees and host communities.

You noted that the provision of **cash assistance** is a crucial element in ensuring empowerment for refugees and that they are able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Finding **alternatives to camps** offers further possibilities for self-reliance.

Together, all of these measures can also help prevent onward movements.

(Solve)

Under the theme of **Pursuing solutions**, you noted that addressing the root causes of forced displacement is an urgent priority for the international community. As one delegation so simply put it: “peace and stability will lead to fewer conflicts, which will in turn lead to less movement of people”.

You stressed that returns must be voluntary – a decision taken by the refugees themselves. In this context, the High Commissioner reminded us that UNHCR’s efforts to support voluntary returns are not political in nature, but always based on humanitarian considerations. The re-absorption capacity of countries of origin must also be taken into account, and development assistance for countries of origin must be strengthened to ensure sustainable repatriation.

You highlighted the efforts made by countries, such as in West Africa, to locally integrate refugees in protracted refugee situations.



Resettlement was reaffirmed as a vital protection tool and expression of solidarity with refugee host countries. However, concerns were raised about the gap between resettlement needs and available spaces. States were encouraged to start resettlement programmes, or to expand existing programmes. Consideration could also be given to different types of admission, such as family reunification. A number of States announced increases in resettlement places, and I hope you will consider the call for more attention to vulnerable groups. It is important to keep in mind that, for many individuals, resettlement is the only viable solution to their plight.

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Within the organization, you urged UNHCR to adapt to the “**new ways of working**” under the “grand bargain”, the global compact on refugees and system-wide initiatives. The major reform initiatives underway within UNHCR, particularly the regionalization process announced by the High Commissioner, are seen as encouraging steps in this regard and, I think I can say – on behalf of this Committee – that you, Mr. High Commissioner, have our full support. There is no better time

for UNHCR to be innovative, effective, efficient, agile and accountable.

With regard to the “**grand bargain**”, I would like to stress the importance of non-earmarked and multi-year funding, which was highlighted by many delegations and which will place UNHCR in a stronger position to do everything we expect of the organization.

Finally, delegations commended UNHCR for its strong response and transparency in addressing and **preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment**, and welcomed the High Commissioner’s commitment to a zero tolerance policy in this regard. You also appreciated the emphasis placed on **gender equality**. UNHCR was asked to make sure sufficient resources are dedicated to the relevant structures within the organization to support these endeavours.

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

With respect to the **comprehensive refugee response framework**, you applauded the 15 roll-out countries. As one delegation noted: “they are the vanguard and are setting the example for the rest of us to follow”. Several countries applying the CRRF spoke of the concrete impact it is having in transforming the manner in which they respond to refugees, including through the **regional approaches** pursued in relation to the Somali refugee situation and in the Central America context. The application of the CRRF has been a catalyst for real change in this regard. You voiced concern for resource mobilization, particularly to operations in Africa, and noted that it is vital for those countries implementing the CRRF to be provided with the means to do so. At the same time, the efforts of many countries implementing comprehensive responses, despite not being formal roll-out countries, were also commended.

As noted by many of you, **the global compact on refugees** represents a powerful step forward for international cooperation and solidarity. Many of you commended UNHCR

for the transparent and inclusive process through which the compact was developed and highlighted the important contributions to the process from a wide range of stakeholders. Looking ahead, you emphasized that it will be important for States to follow through with the robust implementation of the refugee compact and to honour your commitments as spelled out in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. When fully operational, the global refugee compact will be instrumental in making sure that the burden and responsibility for protecting and assisting refugees is shared in a truly equitable and predictable manner. Broadening the base of support from various stakeholders is an integral part of the global compact on refugees and you stressed the need for development resources to be truly additional to humanitarian funding. In 2019, the Global Refugee Forum will provide an important opportunity to make actual pledges, highlight key achievements and track progress against the objectives of the global compact on refugees.

As one delegation said: “Despite the suffering and challenges, 2018 has been a year of some optimism.” I agree with the hope expressed that, in years to come, we can look back on our

engagement this year as having important positive outcomes on behalf of those displaced. Your statements over the past few days have proven that protecting, assisting and finding solutions for refugees are truly global issues in need of global solutions.

“We are not indifferent” truly captured why we are here.

I urge all of us to come together and to translate our expressions of solidarity into concrete actions. This begins with a strong endorsement of the global compact for refugees in the General Assembly this fall – as many of you have called for. But let us not forget - that with the adoption of this compact, the real work starts. I would like to leave you with the words of this year’s Nansen Refugee Award winner, Dr. Atar: who said, “We are here to save lives – not to sit”.

Thank you.