



**UNHCR**

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

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of the High Commissioner's Programme**

**Agenda point 4(a)**

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Mr Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer introductory remarks for the protection session of this year's Executive Committee. It is, as always, informed by the *Note on International Protection*, various protection papers, and the June Standing Committee discussion.<sup>1</sup> I would like to outline key protection developments, as well as offer some thoughts on what this implies for future action. Importantly, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, which world leaders adopted at the United Nations General Assembly Summit on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, has provided strong impetus for the way forward.

Reflecting on **protection developments** over the past year, I must admit the following image, first coined by Antonio Gramsci, has come to mind: "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters."

The monsters in today's world most certainly are the horrors of raging conflict, violence, and human rights abuses, which people flee within or outside their countries year after year, often confined to an existence of displacement with no end in sight, seeing the societies they lived in changed forever. This is a daily reality for women who wonder how long they have to endure the harrowing power games of leaders they did not choose, or who suffer abductions, rapes, and killings. Or of children who are forced to run, often on their own, from threats by criminal gangs acting in collusion with local authorities, and ending up in horrid detention conditions or fending off sexual assaults. Or of families who are displaced not once, but multiple times, sometimes on the road for years on end. The monster is all too conspicuous for those who are trapped and besieged in Aleppo, wondering how to survive when the most meagre basic necessities run out and the threat of aerial bombardment is constant. The monster is also a reality for those, desperate after decades of war, who are confronted with a resumption of violence, disorder, or failing governance.

In a picture all too familiar, recent accounts of new arrivals from South Sudan point to a breakdown in law and order, rampant violence, robberies, extortion of money by armed groups who prevent those unable to pay from leaving, and sexual assaults on women. Armed groups are also alleged to abduct children from schools. Disappearances are reported to be on the rise. In too many places around the world, we hear similar accounts of why people run for their lives and

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<sup>1</sup> The following papers are available online at:  
<http://www.unhcr.org/search?comid=4a2fc7dd6&cid=49aea93a20&scid=49aea93a15>: *Note on International Protection*, *Statement by the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection*, as well as conference room papers on specific aspects of protection, including *Gender Equality, Programme/Protection policy: Youth*, *Update on Resettlement*, *New Approaches to Solutions*, *Introduction to CRP.12 on Refugee Status Determination*, and *Update on Voluntary Repatriation*.

why it is so crucial to reinforce asylum and protection. It is an undeniable fact that civilians bear the brunt of violent conflict, not least due to continuing blatant disregard for international humanitarian law.

It is clear, against this backdrop, that the international protection regime is needed as much now as it was when it was conceived. This legal regime, anchored in multilateralism and developed over decades, is a lifeline for millions and has withstood the test of time. It is the part of the “old world” which must be preserved in the formulation of the “new”, as conflict prevention, genuine human rights commitments, and good governance remain wanting. We must bolster the safeguards that were crafted for the individuals who suffer the most.

Yet this regime faces formidable challenges and indeed dilemmas. There is increasingly a dangerous mix of political, criminal, and ideological motives behind violent conflicts and unrest, their localized expressions, and their regional and even global linkages. Weapons, for example, are rarely produced in conflict areas. This weakens the cohesion of societies everywhere, raising questions about governance and even the legitimacy of the state. Increasingly, leaders are using security terminology [“terrorists”, “drugs”, “criminal gangs”, etc.] to speak about individuals who are actually the victims of such phenomena. This blurs the lines and contributes to ignorance about the international law principles, distinctions, and protections – notably towards civilians – which were so painstakingly built in the wake of the Second World War.

We see time and again how policies of deterrence, once deliberately unleashed with scant regard for the individual human being, can easily slip into policies of mistreatment and punishment. How detention is not just inhuman, but also very costly. How restricting rights and confining people to an existence of dependency in camps for generations is counterproductive. How laws and decrees are passed in the knowledge that they contravene human rights safeguards. How some distort the facts for self-serving purposes. And how others make great noise about withdrawing from time-honoured human rights treaties, including the 1951 Convention, that embody the best of our heritage.

It is incongruous to have non-entrée and regional containment policies on the one hand whilst benefiting from globalization and interdependence on the other. It is untenable to expect others, due to the sheer coincidence of geography, to have entrée policies without benefiting from robust, predictable, and sustained support. The lack of a coherent response to increased numbers of arrivals of asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants has seen several States responding with unilateral and restrictive measures, which run contrary to the principle of solidarity. It is precisely for such dilemmas, in the spirit of equity and fairness, that truly collective, multilaterally agreed frameworks have been crafted to support countries that are more disadvantaged and host nearly 90 per cent of the global refugee population. Without such frameworks, and without proper support for the countries that need it most, we are not truly protecting refugees.

Yet in this environment, there is hope. Staying with my earlier image – catching a glimpse of the not-yet-born – we have also seen a much needed revival of multilateralism over the past year – hopefully the beginnings of a solid new order of collective engagement. We look forward to the full and inclusive implementation of commitments that have been made: At the global level, the Sustainable Development Agenda was adopted in September 2015. The Nansen Protection Agenda on Cross-Border Displacement in the context of disasters and climate change was endorsed by 109 States in October 2015, leading to the subsequent launch of the Platform on Disaster Displacement. The Paris Climate Agreement COP21 was agreed, clearly recognizing the displacement angle and establishing a task force to avert, minimize, and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change. And most recently, the New York Declaration was adopted, setting in motion a process for formulating a Global Compact on Refugees that aims to address refugee situations more comprehensively and equitably. We also welcome the fact that this Executive Committee will pass two protection conclusions again after a three-year pause.

In the face of today's monsters, some want to retreat into inwardness and isolationism, but those looking toward the creation of the "new" know that the interdependence of life and interconnectedness of so many phenomena need an approach that surpasses the narrowness of unilateralism, short-term gains, and the spread of half-truths. This requires the conviction that despite setbacks and slow starts, the only solution lies in collective and multilateral ones, as difficult and complex as they may be. It was therefore prescient to dedicate this year's *Note on International Protection* to the theme of responsibility-sharing and indeed to engage with this Committee on how this perennial gap can be filled through protection-based Comprehensive Refugee Responses in anticipation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Mr Chair,

Allow me to focus on a couple of protection themes that have dominated the past year, which I will consider from the perspective of the **need for a reinvigorated social contract** at different levels – which in some way underpins a Global Compact on Refugees. The idea of the social contract has often come to mind during my missions as fundamental in the displacement experience.

Because of the rupture of the social contract with their country of origin, refugees and the internally displaced can no longer count on the protection of the State and will only overcome their predicament by connecting to it somehow, somewhere. Let us not forget, particularly within the status vs. needs debate, that displacement, including to another country, brings with it a huge loss at the human and socio-economic level. It means living in a different environment where the authorities as well as the legal and policy frameworks do not necessarily take into account the rifts inherent in displacement or enable early recovery from trauma. It also means, all too often, being barred from normal social and economic interaction. It means uncertainty, unpredictability, and the weakening of personal agency and human security.

The specific legal, social, and human predicament of refugees requires the reestablishment of the social contract between refugees and their host States, which the 1951 Convention was designed to address. Refugees are unable to return home because of conflict or persecution, which necessitates a particular legal status to re-establish this contract of mutual responsibility and obligations. UNHCR was created specifically towards this end. It is in recognition of this that we need to take a strong stance against obscuring the specific legal and social predicament of refugees.

Refugees and migrants are therefore distinct categories. At the same time, there are in practice many common features of their experiences, including the risks they face from smugglers and traffickers or from rising xenophobia. This requires that we forge stronger linkages and exchange expertise between the fields of refugee protection and **migration**. It is time for us to work on protection approaches that embrace human mobility. We need to identify the advantages of looking at the fate of populations of concern through a migration lens – for example, by studying evidence derived from migration and labour market studies to influence attitudes towards human mobility. Conversely, UNHCR will offer lessons learned from its long experience in protection to discussions of how we can ensure that the human rights of migrants are better ensured. The two-year process leading toward a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018 will provide an opportunity for exploring further the interface between migration and forced displacement, including both areas of convergence and those that are distinct.

Re-establishing the social contract requires that people of concern are placed at the centre of any response. This remains an important cornerstone of our operational engagement and our accountability to beneficiaries. Yet, this orientation towards affected people – placing them at the centre of protection and humanitarian action – cannot be successful if it is not embraced more broadly by all actors as a key characteristic of governance and at the core of the social contract between the State and society.

It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the need for **international solidarity** has been increasingly a dominant theme. Solidarity is essential to the effective functioning of the international protection regime. It attracted the most attention at the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants last month and will indeed be one of the core tenets of the Global Compact on Refugees. It is a fundamental value behind any form of international cooperation and is a crucial part of the contract between and among nations, large and small, and irrespective of the resources at their disposal. It advances a sense of equality and equity and overcomes the coincidence of geography, including in the context of displacement. This Committee has often pronounced itself on solidarity, and as early as in 1978 reaffirmed solidarity as a primary condition for the effective implementation of international protection in general.

And indeed, many countries and communities around the world continue to demonstrate solidarity in their positive responses to new arrivals, particularly at the civil society level. The generosity of countries that are keeping their borders open and providing refugees with opportunities to start anew is commendable. By way of example, in response to the latest large-scale refugee influx from South Sudan, Uganda's generous refugee law and policy regime, among other benefits, grants refugees freedom of movement and the right to seek employment, and provides them with plots of land on which to build new homes and grow agricultural crops. The multi-year Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategy [ReHOPE], covering all refugee-hosting districts, and the Government Settlement Transformative Agenda set strong examples of what can be accomplished when a holistic, long-term approach is taken to address refugee situations. It is through initiatives such as these that the social contract can be realized in a meaningful and sustainable way.

On the international plane, including on the financing side and with the increased engagement of international financial institutions, particularly the World Bank, we have also witnessed a more acute realization that major host countries will require continued support, translated into concrete commitments. There is lots of room for innovative thinking and creating win-win situations as we develop Comprehensive Refugee Responses and embark on consultations for the Global Compact on Refugees – thus reinforcing the primacy of the international protection regime, and agreeing on the need for all countries to share their collective responsibilities.

At the same time, we have seen from other sectors of society a wave of vitriolic opposition to new arrivals, couched in concerns about security and integration capacity, and fuelling even further **xenophobia and racism**. We know that retreat into identity politics – recalling a past that never existed – rather than embracing diversity, is counterproductive and can even be dangerous. It is driving societies and communities farther apart than ever before, fuelling tensions and potentially violence. It is a portent and a litmus test of the treatment of others, including citizens belonging to minority groups. The irony is that it is often xenophobia and racism that drive refugees to flee in the first place. It demonstrates that establishing the social contract can only be successful if it is addressed at all levels – from the interpersonal to the international.

After all, the role of leadership and governance is also to advance pluralism and social cohesion through dialogue with local communities. In the public debate, I wonder how we can better bridge the apparent disconnect between, on the one hand, core humanitarian values and the evidence-base demonstrating the net contributions of refugees to societies, and on the other, oftentimes emotionally driven scaremongering, anti-refugee rhetoric, and demagoguery. I doubt that we have found the recipe that would heal the rifts, address the raw emotions underneath them, and channel the energies into a positive and constructive acceptance of new realities while addressing them head-on. Nonetheless, it is heartening in this environment that there was considerable support demonstrated for the UN campaign to counter the toxic narrative on refugees and migrants, which was launched during the UN Summit last month.

Xenophobic tendencies have real consequences for the lives of refugees, and have fed into recent legislative developments in various parts of the world which are reducing access to, and the

quality of, protection space. Some countries have proposed and even eroded measures in a unilateral manner with the aim of stemming movements of people – contrary to principles of protection and solidarity. In this connection, UNHCR’s supervisory role – itself an expression of multilateralism – will continue to be crucial. In the interest of holding States accountable for their protection obligations, this requires monitoring, information-gathering and analysis, providing advice, and designing effective intervention mechanisms. This is, of course, linked to our cooperation with key actors in the rule of law arena – notably the judiciary and legal communities – but it also entails, importantly, direct engagement with Governments – with different branches of government and at different levels of authority.

In this climate of fear, **security considerations** have increasingly come to the fore, further exacerbated by unsettling incidents of violence and horrific terrorist attacks in several countries around the world – each one further heightening the risk of erosion of public support for the reception of refugees. In some instances, this has led to highly politicized and emotive debates around the acceptance of Syrian, Somali, Afghan, and other refugees. Politicians are also grappling with a sense of loss of control in their constituencies. In a few countries, security concerns have even had serious implications for the viability of resettlement programmes. It is clear that security incidents challenge the very notion of the social contract at its core since the intrinsic expectation is that the State should provide a safe and secure environment for its citizenry.

In a welcome development, political leaders in a number of countries have made it clear that refugees are in fact the first victims of violence and extremist or terrorist groups, and must not be placed under general suspicion. These leaders refuse to allow terrorism and violent individuals to change fundamental values of human dignity and asylum – which is unfortunately often the very purpose of such heinous acts. Yet others have used these incidents to do the contrary, spreading misinformation, including through ad campaigns, fueling anxiety, and promoting a tougher line on asylum and migration issues. Fear of terrorism and its unwarranted conflation with refugees have the potential to encourage witch hunts and create the spectre of uncontrolled violence. We have also seen a number of countries passing new legislation or changing practices, which represent a departure from the clear framework of the 1951 Convention on this issue. This risks encouraging an expansive use of security concerns as a reason to deny access to international protection.

In response, UNHCR issued in December 2015 an updated guidance note on *Addressing security concerns without undermining refugee protection*.<sup>2</sup> From our perspective, it is key to promote an integrated approach that both addresses security concerns and upholds international protection standards. The international refugee protection regime clearly balances legitimate security and protection considerations, for example, through its exclusion and national security provisions. It requires, in line with the notion of the social contract, that refugees fully respect the laws of their host countries and honour their duties.

While UNHCR is of course not a security agency, it will be important to engage more with States on how they organize security responses and how we can work together, notably in the 65 countries where UNHCR is heavily involved in individual case processing. In 2015, UNHCR experienced a 10 per cent increase in individual refugee status determination [RSD] applications, registering some 257,000 applications. We are reviewing these operations to identify how RSD may be used most strategically to secure protection so that it is better streamlined and other frameworks for securing protection are utilized more effectively in the face of escalating numbers of individuals seeking protection. There are risks, of course, especially in contexts where UNHCR is expected to process large numbers in increasingly streamlined procedures. To counter these risks, there will be circumstances in which regular or traditional RSD remains the most effective protection intervention for certain individuals, including, for example, persons in

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5672aed34.pdf>.

detention. Also, in the next couple of months, we intend to consider how to mitigate security concerns by bringing together security experts from States to discuss some of the challenges in more detail and to foster more cooperation between States and UNHCR in this area.

Within the security debate, **detention** also often emerges as the response. But detention and criminalization of asylum-seekers, or of irregular migrants for that matter, cannot and must not be the answer. It is used too often simplistically as a tool of law enforcement, in misinformed public debates, as a political bargaining chip, or as a means of deterrence, increasing vulnerability and stigmatizing refugees and asylum-seekers as outsiders to be shunned from normal social interaction. Our *Beyond Detention* campaign has produced some results in the twelve pilot countries, with two countries ending the detention of asylum-seeking children, three finding more alternatives for children, two supporting legislative reforms, and three others producing precedent-setting judgments from High Courts. More needs to be done – and not just in these twelve countries – to move away from this archaic and ineffective means of dealing with new arrivals and especially towards ensuring that the immigration detention of children ends.

It is further important to recall that refugees and IDPs are amongst the greatest victims of security threats, and often face violence during flight and sadly also whilst in displacement. When I visited Borno State in Nigeria earlier this year, I met deeply traumatized men and women who feel insecure, even in IDP settlements. Over the past year, numerous IDP settlements were attacked, including through bombardments, in utter disregard for the civilian nature of such sites. The fact that the insurgents are using children to detonate explosives in public spaces has an incredibly corrosive effect on the social fabric of communities.

**Sexual and gender-based violence [SGBV]** in particular, remains a primary cause of insecurity for refugees and IDPs around the world. Conflict-related sexual violence is a form of persecution that must lead to the recognition of refugee status for individuals affected. UNHCR documented an increase in the number of reported incidents of SGBV from 18,245 in 2014 to 26,632 in 2015, as well as increases in the provision of psychosocial counseling, medical support, material assistance, and safe spaces for survivors.<sup>3</sup> SGBV prevention and response are non-negotiable features of our programmes from the onset of all emergencies, and undergird our strong engagement in the *Call to Action on Protection From Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies*.<sup>4</sup> With the support of the Safe from the Start Initiative, UNHCR provides dedicated, hands-on technical support to emergency operations through the deployment of seven Senior Protection Officers. To date, 13 countries have received 78 months of the Safe from the Start deployments.<sup>5</sup> We are also working closely with Governments and partners to provide expertise and support for changes to legislation, for example in Somalia, and to court practices, such as in Zambia, that promote sensitivity to and the well-being of survivors of SGBV.

Yet we continue to face challenges with shortages of safe houses, weak and overburdened identification and referral systems, and limited capacity of law enforcement in some regions. This year, we identified where the needs are greatest through a diagnostic tool piloted with select operations. SGBV considerations are generally part of their protection strategies, ensuring the availability of medical and psychosocial assistance to survivors. However, safe access to fuel and proper lighting remains insufficient, particularly in operations in Africa. Also, legal assistance and community-based protection outside of camp settings are limited in a number of locations.

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *Global Strategic Priorities Progress Report*, available at:

<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2015%20Global%20Strategic%20Priorities%20Progress%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Call to Action, formally launched in 2013 by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Sweden, aims to transform the way SGBV is addressed in humanitarian operations using the collective action of numerous partners. The United States of America took on leadership of the Call to Action in 2014, and in October 2015, Sweden assumed the leadership.

<sup>5</sup> Including Afghanistan, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

While SGBV affects women and girls, in particular, increasingly we see it also directed against men and boys and LGBTI communities. Access to services and support needs to be facilitated further for these individuals, as well as for survivors with disabilities. We have encouraged operations to step up measures to sensitize frontline staff and to create entry points of access for LGBTI persons of concern. A non-discriminatory approach to SGBV prevention and response is fundamental in all humanitarian settings. It is an approach that must engage communities and always be centred on survivors.

Mr Chair,

Nowhere is the absence of the social contract more apparent than in the fate of millions of **stateless people** around the world. They are excluded from it and are marginalized and stigmatized as a result. We are progressing on our *Global Campaign to End Statelessness*. With the recent accessions of Sierra Leone, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau to both Statelessness Conventions, the tally of States party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness has reached a new high of 89 and 68 respectively. Fifty-three accessions by 35 States occurred since the Ministerial Intergovernmental Event on Refugees and Stateless Persons in December 2011. More than 49,000 stateless people acquired nationality or had it confirmed last year. Since 2015, at least nine countries have introduced legislative and policy changes aimed at preventing or addressing statelessness.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, we need sustained attention and further reductions in the numbers of people who are stateless. It is both this aspect – the resolution of existing statelessness situations – and the prevention of future ones that will be the measures of success for our Campaign and for the Sustainable Development Agenda’s promise of “leaving no one behind”.

Re-establishing the social contract between persons of concern and the States that host them will ultimately therefore require that we heed the call of the High Commissioner for a “**solutions reflex**” in whatever we are doing. More broadly, a solution is found when States take initiatives to ensure that refugees or IDPs can reconnect and re-establish their social contract either back home when conditions allow or in their host communities, and that stateless persons can access their right to a nationality.

As our statistics indicate, realizing the solution of voluntary repatriation has become much harder to achieve over the last couple of years. Too often, the displacement cycle is long and fraught with hardship. The reasons for such protracted refugee situations are many. Importantly, successful peace processes, political stability, and security are needed for sustainable repatriation and reintegration, but they have of late not necessarily been forthcoming in the majority of conflicts. This has had particularly troubling consequences for individuals, such as Afghans and Iraqis, who are facing higher and higher rates of rejection of their asylum claims at a time when the security situations in their countries of origin are worsening. They are often compelled to return to face instability and destitution, with few options but to turn around and flee again. All of this asks us to take another hard look at the plight of those who are in exile and to think about solutions from the onset of a refugee situation.

Given the difficulties of return for many, it is clear that re-establishing the social contract with refugees therefore falls largely with host States where it is key that refugees be included in national services and systems and be able to contribute to society. This came home to me in

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<sup>6</sup> Armenia and Estonia amended their nationality legislation to provide for automatic acquisition of nationality at birth. Montenegro introduced a judicial procedure for late birth registration of people born outside the health-care system. Belarus amended its Law on Citizenship to allow children born on the territory to stateless parents residing temporarily in Belarus to acquire Belarusian citizenship. Tajikistan adopted a Constitutional Law on Nationality, with provisions for the prevention and reduction of statelessness. In 2016, Costa Rica established a statelessness determination procedure. Bolivia adopted a resolution to facilitate the naturalization of refugees and stateless persons. Brazil issued a decree allowing for naturalization without having to renounce any nationality of origin. Greece granted the Asylum Authority the competence to apply the 1954 Convention and required that a Presidential Decree would regulate procedures for determining the status of a stateless person.

particular in July when visiting some of the local self-reliance projects under way in Costa Rica. I was impressed by the positive and generous will of Government interlocutors to include refugees in their national development plans. Their innovative collaboration with the private sector on refugees' labour integration is a good example of where the refugee issue has played a role in catalysing social change and poverty reduction, which could be replicated elsewhere. We also see similar initiatives emerging in other places at the local level, as mayors and administrators in cities around the world, such as New York, São Paulo, Barcelona, Auckland, London, and Toronto, to name a few, are finding creative ways to support the reception of refugees in recognition that well-managed integration can reap enormous benefits, allowing refugees to become contributing members of their new communities.

For this fundamental connection to happen successfully, for people to get on with their lives, and to reduce long-term dependency on assistance, three of the most important ingredients for re-establishing the social contract revolve around ensuring access to employment, education, and family unity in host communities.

With regard to **employment**, we know that the ability to work, build a more secure future for one's family, and contribute to one's community are important both for human dignity and maintaining peaceful, stable, and inclusive societies. Refugees are part of nearly every community around the world, and it is in everyone's interest to ensure that they are included in the advances we make as a society and are not marginalized by their status. It is important that we support countries to strengthen the economic environment so that more refugees may be included in employment opportunities. Their resilience, determination, and resourcefulness are key assets in any workforce.

More and more evidence suggests that refugees are not a burden,<sup>7</sup> and if helped to find work fast, newcomers will quickly return initial investments through their tax payments and other contributions. We also hear increasingly from the private sector that refugees are welcome employees, often in sparsely populated parts of a country, and that investing in refugee skills and training is of value – especially where stay arrangements permit longer-term planning.<sup>8</sup> We hear from economists how refugees do not pose threats, but create opportunities. Their presence and participation in the workforce – the entrepreneurial spirit and desire to succeed that so many bring – can reinvigorate flagging local economies, fill in the gaps left by an ageing workforce,<sup>9</sup> create jobs with the establishment of small businesses, and ultimately help local communities to thrive. Refugees who are able to work and contribute to their host communities' economies often more than “pay back”, so-to-speak, several times over, the costs incurred by these communities in initially receiving them.<sup>10</sup>

The Director-General of the ILO, Mr Guy Ryder, stated at the Ministerial meeting in March 2016 on resettlement and complementary pathways, that work stands at the intersection of the humanitarian and development aspects of the international community's overall response to refugee crises. There is indeed increasing consensus on the need for policy responses that offer the opportunity to refugees to work, trade, start businesses, and move to where economic opportunities can be found. We can build further on opportunities provided by regional mobility

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Betts, A., Bloom, L., Kaplan, J., and Omata, N. “Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions”, Humanitarian Innovation Project, University of Oxford (June 2014), available at: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/refugee-economies-2014.pdf>; and “Economic Impact of Refugees in the Cleveland Area”, Chmura Economics & Analytics (October 2013), available at: <http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/clevelandrefugeeeconomic-impact.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, lessons learned in the report *Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection*, OECD Publishing, Paris (2016), available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251236-en>.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Bodewig, C. “Is the Refugee Crisis and Opportunity for an Aging Europe?” Brookings Institution (21 September 2015), available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2015/09/21/is-the-refugee-crisis-an-opportunity-for-an-aging-europe/>.

<sup>10</sup> Cortes, K. “Are Refugees Different from Economic Immigrants? Some Empirical Evidence on the Heterogeneity of Immigrant Groups in the United States”, Texas A&M University, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA Discussion Paper No. 1063) (March 2004), available at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=524605](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=524605).



arrangements [e.g. ECOWAS, MERCOSUR, and ASEAN], for example. Such changes can make it possible to secure better outcomes for refugees and for local communities, facilitate self-reliance, and direct more resources through national and local systems.

In this connection, a number of important partnerships have emerged. Both with the OECD and the International Labour Organization [ILO], we have recently signed memoranda of understanding underlining, among other matters, the importance of work rights for forcibly displaced people worldwide. With the OECD, UNHCR organized a high-level meeting on integration earlier this year, in order to counter myths and use research evidence to demonstrate how refugees can benefit economies, as well as to make the case for early investment in refugees' integration and social inclusion. Responding robustly to the needs of those arriving is critical not only to facilitating their connections with host societies, but also to influencing positively the perceptions of local communities and countering xenophobic attitudes.

Our work with the ILO focuses on collaboration at the national level and developing a more common understanding of what is needed to support Governments to find safe and decent work for refugees, people displaced inside their own countries, and affected host communities. It also sets out steps aimed at ensuring the inclusion of refugees in labour markets and development initiatives. Tripartite discussions at the ILO in 2016 have highlighted the importance of supporting host countries to improve the economic environment so that there is more appetite for refugee inclusion in the world of work. This is not something that UNHCR is equipped to do alone, and we welcome further discussions with our partners on how to support efforts in areas with large numbers of refugees, IDPs, and returnees that will advance employment prospects for all and foster greater inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR in labour markets and host communities.

We are also collaborating with States, employers, NGOs, and displaced communities on lifting barriers to refugee access to global employment and training opportunities. Refugees, many of whom need to flee without original documents proving their education and work experience, are often prevented from travelling to take up available options, even when they can establish their eligibility. We celebrate the Nansen passport as a significant tool for finding sustainable solutions for refugees and stateless persons in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and need to further build on that and on the Convention Travel Document to make safe travel for work, study, and other opportunities a possibility for more refugees.

Staying with the image that I mentioned at the beginning, the “new world” – or our collective future – lies of course with **children and youth**. A recent report by the ICG, for example, entitled *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's Generation 2000*, makes it clear that strategies are needed for creating a meaningful place in society for children and youth, both in Iraq and beyond. In recognition of this, 2016 has been, in some ways, the year of Youth in UNHCR. The Global Refugee Youth Consultations [GRYC],<sup>11</sup> which resulted in the *Core Actions for Refugee Youth*, and the participation of young refugees, for the first time ever, in the Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Brazil, have been highlights of the year.<sup>12</sup> This year's Annual UNHCR NGO Consultations were organized around the theme of youth, and the High Commissioner's Protection Dialogue in December will focus on children on the move.

We continue to prioritize quality child protection services to communities based on evidence of what works, drawing upon the latest learning in child protection. This includes a stronger focus on the integration of children of concern in national child protection services. We are also

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<sup>11</sup> UNHCR and the Women's Refugee Commission [WRC] undertook the GRYC to amplify youth “voices” in decisions that affect them. The GRYC included 1,267 young people who participated in 56 national or sub-national consultations held in 22 countries between October 2015 and June 2016.

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR is continuing its work on *Youth and Sports* – working with the International Olympic Committee [IOC], the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Youth Refugees and Sport, and other partners to strengthen the use of sports and recreation programming for protection outcomes. A toolkit for Protection through Sports will be issued in 2017 in collaboration with the IOC and Terre des Hommes.

reinforcing child protection in emergencies and protracted situations through strategic staff deployments, and are supporting efforts to protect unaccompanied and separated children in mixed migratory flows, especially from Central America, the Horn and East of Africa, and Afghanistan. We are active in the “Live, Learn and Play Safe” regional initiative [2014-2016] being implemented in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Yemen, and are participating in inter-agency operational working groups on children in mixed migratory flows.

UNHCR is also assisting young people to develop and use their skills and capacities in order to support their communities in displacement and upon return – for example, through the Refugee Youth Workers’ Learning Programme in Kenya [Kakuma], Chad, and Malawi. In Lebanon, the establishment of youth committees has enabled young people to become “the connectors” between host and refugee communities, and between generations. We are further improving programmes for adolescents and youth through innovative approaches such as the Youth Initiative Fund, which has funded 69 projects since 2013.

Young people are not just the future; they are also the present. The *Core Actions for Refugee Youth* and the *Global Compact on Young People in Humanitarian Action* provide us with long overdue frameworks for working with and for young people in the contexts in which we all operate – focusing on formal education, livelihoods, and engagement, as well as on well-being, information, and realizing young people’s potential to form bridges across generations and communities.

In this regard, **education** remains a key challenge and one that young people have identified as a top priority. Educated refugees provide leadership in displacement situations and in rebuilding communities recovering from conflict. Through education, refugees can become agents of social transformation. The future security of individuals and of our societies is inextricably connected to the transferrable skills, knowledge, and capacities that are developed through quality education.

Yet in spite of what we know about the benefits and necessity of education, and the fact that over half of all refugees are under the age of 18, only one in two refugee children of primary school age, and one in four of secondary school age, are enrolled in school, and just one per cent of young refugees are receiving higher education. The consequences of forced displacement are serious, far-reaching, and costly – for both the individual children and youth affected as well as for their communities. Not investing sufficiently in young refugees has dramatic, long-term consequences. If we do not protect them from violence, exploitation, and abuse, if we leave them without education or skills, then the recovery and development of their countries risk being delayed by many years.

As we begin planning at global, regional, and national levels in the next weeks and months to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4, I would like to recall our collective commitment, embodied in the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, to ensure quality education for refugees, IDPs, and children and youth who are out of school because of conflict and crisis. We encourage Governments to include refugee children and youth systematically in their Education Sector Plans, to ensure their inclusion in education programming, and to monitor their participation and educational attainment. This is critical to ensuring that they participate in education, gain skills, and receive certification.

Apart from employment and education, being able to enjoy **family life** and overcoming family separation can be critical guarantors of moving forward. When refugees have become separated from their family members as a result of persecution or war, they must often live with the uncertainty, worry, and constant stress of not knowing whether their family members are safe, where they are located, or if they will ever see them again. They find themselves trying to rebuild their lives and adapt to their new circumstances on their own without the critical support that restoring a family can provide. Prolonged separation can in this sense also prolong integration into new communities.

Despite knowing this, we have seen recent legislative trends instituting criteria restricting family reunification processes or limiting access to long-term residency for individuals who arrived by irregular means. Yet, irregular means are often the only option for joining family members, particularly when high fees or documentary and administrative requirements in family reunification processes prove too onerous for refugees to fulfil. In our experience, providing safe, facilitated, and expedited pathways for refugees to reunite with their family members is essential, so they do not resort to unsafe means to reach them. Family reunion could potentially provide the largest safe pathway to access protection in Europe, North America, and Oceania. With the support that family members can provide to new arrivals, family reunification makes good economic sense, as well.

In recognition of this, in 2005, this Committee called for facilitated entry and liberalization of criteria for family reunification, which more than a decade later remains a pressing concern. Good practices could include facilitated access to embassies, visa waivers, humanitarian visas, or assistance with documentation. The European Union Family Reunification Directive is a positive step in this direction, and more is needed now to remove the practical obstacles that remain for so many refugees in making reunification with their close family members a reality. Recent initiatives by Austria, Germany, Ireland, and Switzerland to admit relatives of Syrians are very welcome in this regard. We will continue to work with States and partners to address the current obstacles to family reunification. Similar to resettlement, States, partners, and UNHCR could also consider convening regularly to identify ways to expand this pathway more effectively.

**Resettlement** and humanitarian pathways have become an increasingly vital part of UNHCR's efforts to find solutions and advocate for more equitable responsibility sharing for refugees. They have provided millions of refugees over the past 65 years with protection and the opportunity to build new lives for themselves and their families. Resettled refugees make important contributions to the countries that receive them, and their active participation and integration in these communities can foster greater awareness and public support for refugees. More than one million refugees have been submitted by UNHCR to over 30 resettlement countries in the past decade. Yet the number of people in need of resettlement far surpasses the opportunities for placement in a third country, as the projected number of people in need of resettlement in 2017 will surpass 1.19 million. In response, UNHCR is increasing its resettlement submissions based on the global quotas provided by resettlement countries, and plans to submit at least 170,000 refugees for resettlement next year, which will constitute a 20-year high, more than doubling submissions since 2012.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the welcome increases in quotas from States, the gap between those who need resettlement and those who will actually be resettled remains great. To tackle this, UNHCR is also focusing on how complementary pathways, such as work visas, family reunion, medical evacuations, and opportunities for study could help bridge this gap. At a high-level conference in Geneva this March, for example, UNHCR called on countries around the world to provide admission through resettlement and other channels to 10 per cent of Syrian refugees. We have an even more opportune moment now with the commitments made by a number of States at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees hosted by the President of the United States of America in September 2016, as well as with the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants. For example, the establishment of resettlement quotas and other admission programmes that could be initiated as part a Comprehensive Refugee Response in the event of a large-scale influx could ensure a more predictable and timely response.

The number of countries offering resettlement and complementary pathways for admission also needs to be expanded. Towards this end, support for emerging resettlement countries can help to ensure that they are well-designed, sustainable over the longer term, and sufficiently resourced to ensure the effective integration of resettled refugees in their new host communities. In this

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<sup>13</sup> The year 2015 witnessed the highest number of submissions during this period (134,044), which was 29 per cent more than in 2014 (103,890). This compares to 74,840 in 2012 and 92,915 in 2013, respectively.

respect, the Emerging Resettlement Country Mechanism, an IOM-UNHCR partnership to build capacity in new resettlement countries, which was initiated by the United States of America, also received some attention at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees, and we welcome the commitment of USD 32 million to this project.

Linked to resettlement, expanded opportunities for the private sponsorship of refugees provide an excellent way for private actors and civil society to participate in a whole-of-society approach to refugee protection.<sup>14</sup> Community groups or individuals could sponsor families, and the private sector could sponsor refugees for work opportunities. Private sponsorship can facilitate family reunification, foster integration by linking refugees directly with local communities who support them, and deepen awareness and empathy. It can also provide another way to expand resettlement capacity in the face of new emergencies or large-scale influxes of refugees. In recognition of this, we are pleased to be working together with the Government of Canada and the Open Society Foundation on an initiative to expand opportunities for refugees to be resettled through private sponsorship programmes around the world.

We also need to think beyond the traditional durable solutions and tap into the link between migration and development as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. National development plans, based upon joint analyses with development actors, need to reflect both the needs and potential contributions of displaced populations. Particularly with regard to education, health, and livelihoods, inclusive approaches make sense economically for States, humanitarian organizations, and refugees alike, and can help to reinstate the social contract between refugees and their host communities. With the launch of the World Bank Flagship Report on forced displacement,<sup>15</sup> and the introduction of new financing facilities and resources, we have the opportunity now to prioritize the development investment opportunities that address longer-term displacement and refugee issues. The Comprehensive Refugee Response framework will provide an important ground for incorporating these initiatives, as it will enable the international community to begin thinking about solutions from the outset of an emergency.

Mr Chair,

**In conclusion**, despite all the doom and gloom, in the shadow of the monsters of conflict, violence, and xenophobia, there is a harbinger of a better world to come. With sufficient political will and demonstrated commitment to genuine responsibility sharing, we can together honour the people who too often have been an afterthought rather than the focus of attention. Protection will have to be the guiding voice of this renewed professed multilateralism because it is so deeply entrenched in the people, their rights, hopes, needs, and aspirations. Working closely with you – this Committee – our international partners, NGOs, and civil society actors will be crucial because none can give birth to this “new world” on their own.

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<sup>14</sup> Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are examples of countries that have private sponsorship programmes.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank. 2016. *Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts*. Washington, DC: World Bank.