

Introductory remarks at the Standing Committee meeting of the
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (64th
meeting)

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Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Thank you for your kind welcome. Today, I am extremely honored to address the Standing Committee for the first time as Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR is an organization whose mission I have embraced for a very long time. I am humbled by the chance to serve, awed by the challenges that lay ahead, and eager to pursue the opportunities presented with the great people who comprise this agency and its enormous network of strong and supportive partners, including all of you in this room.

We are living in remarkable times... parts of the world are a mess, as unstable as it has ever been in recent history, and people are caught in the middle, so desperate that risking everything –even their children –

taking to the high seas in perilous conditions, crammed in the back of trucks and losing their lives by the thousands is viewed as better option than seeking safety on land in one's own country or in a neighboring country. 60 million people around the world have fled their homes because of war, conflict, and persecution or lack a nationality, a state to protect them. This is a staggering statistic by any standard and enough to form the world's 24th largest country. Incredibly, the average number of people displaced worldwide each day rose from nearly 11,000 in 2010 to 42,500 in 2014...each and every day. Not since World War II has the world seen so many people displaced. But lest we become numb to the numbers, every one of those 60 million is a person, a child, a woman, a man, struggling to survive, struggling to make a life for themselves and their families.

At the same time, we are faced today with the biggest funding gap in the history of UNHCR. This has had a dramatic effect on the Office's ability to deliver adequate protection and assistance. Simultaneous large-scale crises continue to stretch UNHCR resources to the limit. Over 40% of the people we are trying to serve are located in countries affected by emergency situations and 53% of our comprehensive budget is focused on meeting the needs in these emergencies. We try not to forget those people in protracted situations, not on the front pages of the newspapers, equally deserving of our attention and support. As you

know, this serious financial situation is the result of ever growing needs and increased competition over dwindling resources. I will not elaborate further as you will hear more detailed reports today from the Controller, and later from the Director of the Division of External Relations.

Mr. Chairman,

I could not address the Distinguished Delegates today without referring to the tragedy which is unfolding in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Four thousand people come to the Greek islands every day. Recent surveys show that 93% of the people who cross come from Syria (70%), Afghanistan (19%), and Iraq (4%). Four and a half years into the crisis, Syrians are the largest forcibly displaced population in the world—one out of every two Syrians. The loss of hope for a political solution, combined with the dramatic deterioration of living conditions in neighboring host countries and shortfalls in international assistance, is forcing desperate families to embark on perilous journeys, risking their lives and those of their children.

All over Europe, there has been a remarkable outpouring of public support and solidarity, including from faith-based organizations, NGOs and private citizens. While most countries continue to honor, as best they can, the human right to seek asylum, UNHCR remains concerned

about the restrictive measures that impede access to asylum. As the High Commissioner insisted last week in Brussels, what is needed now is an urgent, coherent and robust European response to the refugee crisis.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me now to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Aleinikoff, for the impact he had on the lives of refugees. He was a champion for many initiatives in the house, particularly with regard to solutions and innovation, but also important management reforms that have positively impacted UNHCR's operations and left a lasting legacy.

Today, nearly half of all refugees are living in protracted situations and the average length of displacement for both refugees and internally displaced persons has increased substantially. Protracted situations of course impact refugees themselves the most, but also impose particular pressure on host and donor states. Though emergencies grab the headlines, UNHCR remains as committed as ever to resolving protracted displacement in strong partnership with states, civil society, and development actors like the World Bank and the UN Development Program. In this regard, we recognize the critical role played by the Solutions Alliance, and assure you of our continued firm commitment to build on the important work that has already been done to link

humanitarian and development actions for maximal impact.

As we face growing humanitarian needs and increasing budgetary uncertainties, innovation has become central to our ability to protect and assist the people we serve. Fortunately, UNHCR and its private and public sector partners are full of creative and resourceful ideas, the best of which are tested, brought to scale, and used in both emergency and protracted operations. For example, the Refugee Housing Unit, a creation of the Better Shelter Foundation, is now in use in the Horn of Africa, Iraq, and Europe, which is an efficient and cost-effective way to shelter and protect the people we serve. Business as usual is no longer an option — new thinking and innovative approaches are essential to help solve today's intractable problems.

Mr. Chairman,

Regarding UNHCR's 2014 financial statement, biennial programme budget for 2016-2017, and the Reports of the Board of Auditors to the General Assembly and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), the latter two reports were particularly positive about the efforts we have made to strengthen UNHCR's budget formulation, implementation, and program results. The Controller and I were in New York earlier this month to present UNHCR's budget to

ACABQ, which provided further positive guidance to the Office's efforts. We appreciated the positive way in which the Committee examined our activities and the speed with which it produced the report now in front of you.

I am also happy to report that UNHCR has already started implementation of the Board of Auditors' 21 recommendations. The Controller will shortly take you through the measures undertaken by UNHCR to address these specific recommendations and will update you on the status of previous years' recommendations.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to working closely with you in the years to come and listening to your advice in this session of the Standing Committee.