

Check Against Delivery



**STATEMENT
BY
H.E MR. DEMEKE MEKONNEN
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA**

**AT
THE FIRST GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM**

**GENEVA
17 - 18 DECEMBER 2019**

Your Excellency, Recep Erdogan, President of the Republic of Turkey,

Your Excellency, Carlos Quesada, President of the Republic of Costa Rica,

Your Excellency, Imran Khan, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Your Excellency, António Guterres, Secretary -General of the United Nations,

Mr . Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees

Honorable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to convey the warm greetings and best wishes of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who wanted to be amongst you but was unable to do so due to urgent matters that needed his personal attention. I also would like to express my heart felt gratitude to the Government of Switzerland for the warm hospitality accorded to my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful city of Geneva. My thanks also go to High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and his team who have tirelessly worked in the excellent preparation for the first Global Refugee Forum.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Global Refugee Forum is happening at this critical time where more than 70 million people are currently forcibly displaced, of whom 25 million are refugees. Undoubtedly the staggering number of forcibly displaced persons has stretched our capacities for response to its limits. The nuances of the challenges, however, demands looking beyond these figures. As you all know, today, refugee situations remain protracted with an average of 7 years. Achieving political solutions to conflicts remain elusive in many areas leaving refugees with no hope for imminent solutions. The drivers of displacement have also changed manifestly with the growing impact of climate change, natural disasters, inequality and deprivation. However, over the years, the number of charitable hands who warmly welcome refugees have gone down. Similarly, the international protection system is facing assault from a rising populism and anti-refugee and migrant sentiments elsewhere.

I believe that these challenges have profoundly shaped our views about the global refugee response system. The inadequacy of our support shows us that there is a long way to go in giving full effect to the principle of solidarity. The current refugee response system which rests on few donors and host states is untenable to meet our collective aspiration for predictable, adequately sourced and responsive refugee response system. Addressing refugee needs has also proven to be strongly linked to the needs of host communities who bear the brunt of the challenges in hosting refugees first hand.

Hence, we in, Ethiopia, firmly believe that the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees was nothing but a step in the right direction to address the challenges of the day.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Global Refugee Forum comes also at an opportune time to my country, Ethiopia, which is passing through deep political and economic reforms foregrounded on the cardinal principles of togetherness, integration and synergy in our volatile region. The new administration led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has made important strides in introducing democratic reforms in Ethiopia. These measures include release of thousands of political leaders, journalists, bloggers and abolishing restrictive laws that stifled dissent. Opposition parties who were in exile were invited to return to their country and are now freely operating.

Ethiopia's reform process is setting the region also into a new trajectory of peace, democracy, regional integration. Nothing exemplifies the success of this reform than, the 2019 Nobel Peace Award given to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The Prime Minister's appeal that the search for peace should be guided by deep sense of the cardinal moral principle "I am my brothers and sisters keeper" resonates very much with the main objective of this Forum. Indeed, the first step to bring real changes starts in having a mindset that the responsibility to support refugees is a collective responsibility of humanity.

On the other hand, **Mr Chairperson-**. Ethiopia has a proud history of providing protection of and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers which dates back to the 7th century. While we have our own developmental challenges and limited resources and inspite of the significant strain on our natural resources, Ethiopia has kept its doors open for refugees. We strongly believe that such a longstanding generosity is a demonstration of exemplary levels of solidarity to our brothers and sisters of peoples of our region.

My Government has always been committed to initiate and implement comprehensive approaches towards refugee response. In this regard, at the Leaders' Summit on refugees in September 2016 in New York, the Government of Ethiopia has made bold commitments through the nine (9) Pledges that aim to sustainably improve the lives of refugees and host communities. Since then, in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, Ethiopia has already made a significant progress in achieving some of the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. This is particularly evident in the increasing number of refugee enrolment in all levels of education including tertiary education and jobs and livelihood opportunities. In addition, the number of refugees residing outside of the camps have significantly increased. The new refugee law that was adopted in 2019 sets legal framework to enhance freedom of movement and inclusion of refugees in our national systems.

Furthermore, The Government of Ethiopia has formally launched the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework at national and local levels in November 2017, and it has also embraced the subsequent adoption of

the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018. A National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy is tabled for approval for Council of Minister a view to gradually creating self-reliant and resilient refugees and host communities, through enhancing harmonized and integrated services and solutions.

Mr. Chairperson,

Now, allow me to announce the Government of Ethiopia's new pledges that are strongly linked with existing commitments and aligned with the focus areas of the Forum. **The Government of Ethiopia therefore commits to:**

1. Create up-to **90,000 socio-economic opportunities** through agricultural and livestock value chains that benefit both refugees and host communities.
2. Provide quality and accredited skills training to **20,000 host and refugees** on equitable basis taking into account the labour market demand and linkages with existing and new commitments in expanding socio-economic opportunities.
3. Provide market-based and sustainable household and facility-based energy solutions for **3 million host and refugees** through promoting clean and renewable energy sources.
4. Strengthening the Government of Ethiopia's **Asylum System and Social Protection Capacity.**

In this respect, I want to stress that the roll-out and operationalization of the aforementioned pledges is critically dependent on additional and adequate external financing from the international community.

Mr. Chairperson

In closing, I would like to call upon all stakeholders to work together in tackling the root-causes of forced displacement. It is also important we give due attention in ensuring reintegration of refugees remains sustainable. We also need to join hands in expanding third country solutions as an important tool that change circumstances of refugees. Finally, I would like to close my statement by expressing the Government of Ethiopia's commitemnt to deepen inclusive policies towards refugees. **let us rise to challenges of the day! Let us join hands! as we all are " the keeper of our brothers and sisters"**

I thank you!