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Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cyprus

H.E. Ambassador George Kasoulides

at the Global Refugee Forum

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Chair, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Cyprus welcomes this first **Global Refugee Forum** which we consider auspicious in taking stock of the Global Compact on Refugees and an important platform to accelerate our collective efforts to fully implement it.

On this occasion, Cyprus reiterates its firm commitment to the **Global Compact**. We consider it as the most comprehensive world policy commitment aiming at strengthening the international response to large movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations. It is also the driving force to enhance equitable burden and sharing responsibility.

Chair,

The latest figures in Europe show that the migration flow is still increasing, especially via the Eastern Mediterranean route. Cyprus comes first among EU MS regarding first time asylum applications in relation to its population. In 2019 we received around 12,000 asylum applications. These numbers represent a continuous trend of high increase during the last three years which taking into account the size of the country, its resources and its population pose significant challenges in terms of reception and integration capacities.

Notwithstanding the challenges, Cyprus remains committed in providing **protection and assistance** to refugees and asylum seekers. It is for these reasons that we cosponsor the thematic segment of this Forum on **education** as we believe education represents a key component for the integration and resilience of refugees and asylum seekers. The Government of Cyprus has been active in expanding its educational capacities by introducing several programs for refugees and asylum seekers, including free language and civic lessons to both children and adults, programs of life-long education, including English, technology, music and art lessons.

Cyprus recognizes the importance of fostering **good relations and peaceful coexistence** in the host communities. We are implementing anti-discrimination policies in schools by specific workshops and personnel trainings aiming at preventing bullying and discrimination based on any form of diversity, including religion, ethnicity, language, appearance, disability, gender and sexual orientation.

Reception and integration of refugees and asylum seekers is a top priority of our strategy. To this end, the Government of Cyprus has been consistently taking measures to establish and equip refugee Reception Centers. Vocational training programs are also key components of our policies as we believe that the integration of refugees to the labour market is vital not only to their livelihood but also to their well-being.

In closing, Chair, I wish to emphasize that Cyprus highly values the activities of UNHCR in ensuring international protection and safeguarding the rights and welfare of refugees and asylum seekers. I would also like to praise the High Commissioner and the personnel of the High Commission for their dedicated work especially in volatile and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

Thank you