

## High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges

### “Protection Challenges during Pandemics”

21 October 2020, virtual

#### Opening

#### German Intervention

Assistant High Commissioner Triggs,

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has spread to all parts of the world and has a particularly damaging effect on displaced persons, the Global Compact on Refugee provides a blueprint for a continuous effective protection of refugees and a solutions-oriented response to large refugee situations. It is not despite but because of the COVID-19 pandemic that we should collectively make all efforts to implement and potentially adapt and fast track our pledges.

We would like to share some of the measures taken by the German government to ensure continued protection and resilience of forcibly displaced persons during the pandemic.

#### 1) Support refugee protection and resilience worldwide

As the Federal Budget was amended and increased by the German Parliament, the German government was able to provide additional 450 million Euros for humanitarian assistance in the context of COVID-19; including 55 Mio. EUR for UNHCR's emergency response to the pandemic. With the additional funding, the German government intended to help humanitarian partners like UNHCR address pandemic-related humanitarian needs without having to withdraw funds from other urgent activities in its ongoing operations. In order to further and quickly support our humanitarian partners, react and adapt to their humanitarian response to the evolving pandemic-related humanitarian situation and in line with the Grand Bargain commitments, the additional funds were provided to be used as flexibly as possible. Thus, UNHCR is able to decide where the funding is most needed and best used according to its regional and sectoral priorities. [In addition, for the COVID-19-related funding, also administrative requirements were kept as light as possible. Germany's contributions of 100 million Euros to the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) as well as of more than 180 million Euros to Country-based Pooled Funds have been further means to enable the humanitarian system to respond quickly.] The support to pooled funds particularly fostered a localized response to COVID-19, which became especially important as access for international organizations became more and more restricted.

Apart from additional funding, Germany has adopted a number of measures to facilitate the humanitarian response to the pandemic – particularly to ensure predictability of funding and a steady cash flow. At the very beginning of the outbreak of the pandemic and before additional funding was made available, Germany committed a large portion of its regular humanitarian budget,

including the voluntary core contributions to humanitarian organizations, as early contributions to its partners (so called “frontloading”).

With an additional 1 million Euros provided by the German government, UNHCR could adapt the implementation of its DAFI university scholarship programme; monitoring of refugee students’ well-being was sustained via phone calls and messenger formats throughout lock-downs.

In addition, Germany has redirected 150 million Euros from its 2020 budget for development assistance as part of its Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme. Additional 374 million Euros of new commitments were made available for 2020 alone for COVID-19 related activities of Germany’s Transitional Development Assistance and its Special Initiative on Forced Displacement. These funds are used to stabilize fragile regions affected by crises and displacement, mainly in Syria and neighbouring countries, North Africa, the Sahel region, Yemen and southern Ethiopia. They are mainly dedicated to strengthening health care services and sanitation infrastructure, providing relevant basic services and food security as well as promoting employment and supporting SME in order to reduce the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. For example, in Iraq up to five additional provisional hospitals will be constructed in Baghdad, Mosul, Erbil, Anbar and Basra, with the capacity of treating 9.000 patients in 2020. In Turkey, Germany provides support for the training and employment of Syrian doctors and medical staff in the Turkish health system and has redirected 4 million Euros to provide two million additional items of medical and protective equipment. In Mali, Mauritania and Niger, 1.7 million people from particularly vulnerable households receive cash transfers and complementary social services for nutrition, child protection, the prevention of infection, and training for employment. In Jordan, the salaries for regular as well as temporary additional teachers are paid in order to facilitate continuous education in dual-shift schools for around 36.000 Syrian refugees and Jordanian children. In Bangladesh, temporary income is provided in order to sustain basic livelihood for nearly 3.000 host community households whose subsistence is in acute danger due to the COVID-related interruption of income-creating activities.

## 2) Grant international protection despite pandemic-related restrictions

Germany itself is still the fifth largest refugee hosting country worldwide. In line with international refugee law, we have been granting access to territory to asylum seekers as before the pandemic and despite the introduction of border controls and continued registration and reception of asylum seekers. Formally lodging an asylum application has remained possible and was made possible by applying in written form. Necessary health care has been provided to infected asylum seekers and information about new rules and health care was provided in several languages.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The systematic evaluation of its Covid-19 response and the deduction of lessons learnt for potential future global emergencies will accompany UNHCR’s work of the years to come like a common thread. The results of this year’s HC’s Dialogue will be a highly valuable basis for next year’s negotiations of the ExCom Conclusions on “Protection and Solutions in the context of health emergencies”. We are therefore very much looking forward to a series of fruitful sessions and are prepared to contributing our lessons learnt – from the perspective of a large refugee host as well as of a donor country. We are also looking forward to learning from others and encourage all fellow member states, civil society representatives, the private sector, international organisation and last but not least refugees and displaced persons themselves to join and actively shape the discussion.