

(Check on delivery)

Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on events in Europe. You have all received the Regional Overview which outlines the many highs and lows, challenges and opportunities of the past year. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have in the plenary session. But today I prefer to look forward to what we must do, rather than back. For many of us, there is likely only one topic for this session: the crisis in Ukraine.

Allow me to begin with a few words of gratitude—and admiration—for my UN and other humanitarian colleagues who have remained in Ukraine. As conflicts around the world have continued to multiply, ‘Stay and Deliver’ has—sadly—become a defining creed. But we should never forget the meaning behind these words—sacrifice, commitment and ingenuity, solidarity, and courage.

I want to pay particular tribute to our national colleagues, who face the added burden of having their families and friends in harm’s way. And yet they remain, willingly, at the core of our response. I would be remiss if I did not open my remarks by lauding their exceptional fortitude.

Distinguished delegates,

The conflict in Ukraine continues to result in human suffering, loss of life, and destruction on an incomprehensible scale.

Within Ukraine, we estimate that more than a million people have been internally displaced by fighting. They face diminishing options for where to go and how to survive amid extraordinary levels of destruction and the disruption of services. It is, in short, a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions, unfolding in real time. If conflict persists, if a political solution remains elusive, Ukrainians will continue to flee.

This conflict has also resulted in the largest refugee movements Europe has experienced in a generation or more. And the largest, most rapid pace of refugee arrivals since the second World War. I have just returned from Romania, Moldova, and Poland where I joined the High Commissioner. What we saw is almost beyond description - both in hearing what people fled: their separation from family and loved ones; their shock and disbelief; the countless human tragedies – but also the welcome and embrace they have received in countries of refuge both by the governments (all of which have my

deepest gratitude for their leadership) and the people, who have expressed a humbling level of hospitality and empathy, and are demonstrating that solidarity is strong in Europe.

You have seen the latest refugee figures on the UNHCR data portal – right now there are some 2,011,312. And let's remember that we have not yet reached the two-week mark since this all began.

In addition to refugees, there are also many third country nationals fleeing. While we are working to ensure access to territory (and all people, irrespective of race or nationality, must be able to flee), IOM is leading on support to them and with respective governments in countries of arrival and origin to facilitate solutions.

I am deeply concerned that unless the conflict ceases, we will experience far higher levels of forced displacement, both within Ukraine and to neighbouring countries. We must be ready for this. And continue to work together to ensure that their protection and inclusion in host societies can be sustained over time.

The EU decision to trigger —for the first time in its history—the Temporary Protection Directive, is most welcome. This will allow refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people arriving from Ukraine to quickly regularize their legal status, alleviating pressure on asylum systems and instead focusing energies on inclusion and provision of services. It will also enable refugees to find work, access services, and benefit from social protection in Member States throughout the Union. We also welcome the announcement by the governments of the United States, Canada, Brazil and others to grant temporary protection to Ukrainians. This is critical.

We also need much more support to countries bordering Ukraine. While EU host countries are doing well and are receiving support from the rest of the Union, I am particularly concerned about the situation in Moldova, which remains precarious.

The refugee crisis comes on top of other extraordinary challenges in that country and I ask all those with resources to do whatever you can to support the government's response. This starts with providing much more immediate humanitarian support, especially as the conflict moves westward. But I also encourage you – with the same sense of urgency - to provide development and budgetary support directly to the government. This will be even more important as we move from the immediate to the near term.

While many of the arrivals are transiting through first host countries to reunite with family elsewhere in Europe, many are also staying where they are, joining families who have long settled. This is particularly the case in Poland which has received over 1.2 million refugees to date and whose generosity and management of the response has been impressive. With time passing and resources

diminishing, the number of refugees needing integration will rise. They and the states that host them, will need support to ensure their inclusion in all sectors of public life - health and education, access to labor and other services. This means more doctors, teachers, classrooms, electricity, water, public services, jobs, housing/shelter and other necessities of life.

Excellencies/ladies and gentlemen,

As I said earlier, I was struck with the compassion, the empathy, and the enthusiasm of the local communities to welcome and support the large influx of refugees. People streamed to the border to provide hot food and drinks to help ward off the freezing cold. They donated clothes, cash, and much more. Sustaining this solidarity in the months ahead will be crucial, especially as we expect to see Ukrainians with fewer resources and perhaps without family abroad begin to arrive in the coming days and weeks. The first step is of course to work in support of the robust, host government-led responses which are currently under way. They are leading and directing the response. We will also need to step-up our support to local NGO partners and to community-based organizations.

UNHCR, along with our sister humanitarian agencies and NGO partners, is committed to a joint response. All international support to the response is coordinated under the refugee coordination model led by UNHCR. There is more than enough work for everyone, and the refugees desperately need all hands on deck. The sum of collective expertise and support, if pulled in the same direction, will be a formidable support to affected states and populations. And as aid flows in and more and more people offer help, we need to respond to the requests of all the governments and give them a single point of contact to ensure that the offers of help match the needs on the ground and are directed to the places where they are most needed. UNHCR is playing that role and we will continue to strengthen our capacities to do this efficiently and effectively.

As you know, this response requires significant funds. I am extremely grateful to Member States that made such generous pledges to the \$1.7 billion Flash Appeal for inside Ukraine and the \$550.6 million against UNHCR's Regional Refugee Response Plan on 1 March. Please now convert the pledges into contributions and please also be as flexible as possible with those funds. We don't know where exactly people will move and the response both inside and outside must have the flexibility to adapt to the needs. In speaking of funding, I would be remiss if I did not highlight the record level of support from private citizens, demonstrating once again that they – that your constituents – stand with refugees. Since 24 February, private sector donors have given some \$120 million to UNHCR alone for the Ukraine emergency response inside Ukraine and in neighbouring countries, while individuals have given \$30 million. At this early point in the crisis, private sector contributions and in-kind support are outpacing government contributions by a wide margin.

These appeals are not small, but they are necessary. Allow me a few points on how we are already responding.

First and foremost, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine is dire. The destruction within the country is enormous—and likely to worsen. With the Humanitarian Country Team’s response, coordinated by OCHA and under the leadership of the Crisis Coordinator, UNHCR is pre-positioning stocks of core relief items for distribution in conflict-affected areas. Blankets, kitchen sets, plastic sheets, jerrycans and other items, including more specialized items donated by our partners in the private sector—are in place in strategic locations in the region. Our first convoy of relief items arrived in Western Ukraine yesterday from Poland to supplement UNHCR stocks in different parts of the country and together with our partners, we are moving to distribute lifesaving assistance as quickly as possible to as many people as we can reach.

Where conditions allow, we also distribute multi-purpose cash to help people make choices best suited to their needs. Flexible forms of assistance are crucial, as are innovative approaches. We have put in place a supermarket voucher programme in the western part of Ukraine, which provides support to IDPs to meet basic food needs. We are now looking to expand this programme to other parts of the country—and we will continue to innovate and adapt in response to a volatile situation.

Our long history in the country is an advantage. We have the trust of the community, and this will help us respond to humanitarian needs of people wherever they may be located. But, as you know, the situation remains one of active conflict and is unpredictable and dangerous for our staff and partners too. We must therefore work within the UN’s security apparatus and ensure that we have sufficient security guarantees for humanitarian colleagues in order to deliver. OCHA and UNDSS have brought their expertise to this extremely challenging environment and are leading the deconfliction mechanism, which is critical to humanitarian operations.

Turning to the response in the region, this is not only a complex refugee crisis of enormous proportion, but it is also a child protection crisis. A family separation crisis. The risks of human trafficking and exploitation are already apparent with the arrival of so many young women refugees. We need to move quickly and in close partnership with UNICEF, NGOs and other agencies with relevant mandates and much-needed expertise to contribute. We will also work closely with WFP for the logistical support and positioning of aid. If I have one message today—it’s a pledge that UNHCR will lead a response with a sense of common purpose, inclusivity and partnership, and a division of responsibilities that makes the most sense.

How do we do this?

First, we work in close partnership with the local population and service providers, established refugee networks, and other organizations to identify vulnerable individuals and channel them for assistance. They are an indispensable part of our response.

Second, we will coordinate protection capacity with sister agencies through a 'one-stop shop' approach. Together with UNICEF, we have successfully piloted the 'blue dot' concept in other contexts, and we will replicate and adapt in neighboring host countries. As people register for assistance, specialized agencies and partners can identify people at specific risk and tailor assistance and make referrals accordingly. Even before the EU's decision to trigger the Temporary Protection directive, several host countries had also announced plans to quickly regularize status and extend access to rights to social assistance and labor markets. These are indeed welcome developments. But given the scale and pace of arrivals, it is inevitable that bureaucratic bottlenecks will develop, and people may face challenges in accessing social safety nets—precisely at the moment they most need help.

In regional neighboring host countries, starting with Moldova and Poland where the programme was approved yesterday by the Prime Minister, UNHCR has in place a transitional multi-purpose cash programme. This will enlarge the choices available to them, allow them to prioritize their own needs, and provide a critical safety net at a moment of intense trauma and anxiety regarding their futures. The amounts are linked to the social protection entitlements they will eventually be eligible to receive. The programme is also flexible enough to allow other agencies to top up amounts with dependency benefits, or to further help people deemed at extreme risk.

I would not attempt to capture all of the elements of a large-scale regional response that are now coming together in neighboring host countries together with our partners and sister agencies. Needs assessments are ongoing, and coordination structures are quickly emerging. We have established a presence in Moldova, and continue to scale up dramatically in Romania, Poland and the multi-country office in Budapest to meet the moment. Other UN agencies are doing the same. We have also increased our monitoring capacities in likely destination countries within Europe and beyond.

Let me close with a word of immense gratitude to our Executive Committee member states, observers, and our partners present today. Difficult days lie ahead, and we will continue to rely on your active engagement. Millions of refugees are counting on us to get this right—and we cannot afford to fail.

Thank you.

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