

Statement of the Executive Committee

on the occasion of
the high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation
6-7 October

66th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

We, Member States of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, on the occasion of a high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation, wish to emphasize the need to resolutely address one of the longest protracted refugee situations. Despite the multitude of complex humanitarian crises facing the international community today, it is imperative that all efforts be made to find and implement solutions for Afghan refugees, who have sought refuge outside their country for over 35 years, in light of the renewed dialogue and partnership among governments in the region and commitment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to support phased and voluntary return and reintegration.

We are deeply grateful for the video presentation by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and for the presentations by the ministers of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. Despite the voluntary return of 5.8 million Afghan refugees since 2002, there remain more than 2.6 million Afghan refugees in the neighbouring countries of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan.

The renewed commitment of the Afghan Government of National Unity in making voluntary repatriation and reintegration of its citizens among its highest national priorities presents a unique opportunity to address this protracted situation. While international support has been generous, solutions for the returnees and remaining Afghan refugees will be elusive without lasting peace, security, and development. Returning refugees are vital to foster nation building and the reconstruction of their country, for which a conducive environment needs to be created. The voluntary return of Afghan refugees in safety and dignity should be facilitated along with their sustainable reintegration. We, therefore, appreciate the commitment by the Government of Afghanistan to include them in the national development planning and prioritization processes.

We highly commend the exemplary generosity and hospitality of the people and Governments of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan in hosting Afghan refugees. We recognize the profound impact of the protracted refugee situation on host communities, economies, services, infrastructure, environment and security. Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration may pose specific challenges such as access to land, livelihood opportunities and provision of basic amenities for which the international community must play its due role and provide urgently needed assistance and financial support.

We reaffirm our support for the Solutions Strategy for the Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR), endorsed by the international community in 2012, which presents the framework to identify and implement lasting solutions for Afghan refugees in the region. We are strongly encouraged by the aligning of national plans for Afghan refugees, prioritising empowerment of women and youth, by the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, reflecting close dialogue and partnership.

We reaffirm the principles of international solidarity, responsibility and burden sharing and partnership, and are grateful for the commitments expressed by Member States, including resettlement countries, and the affirmations of support to the country of origin, the host countries and communities, UNHCR, other UN and relevant humanitarian and development actors and civil society working on behalf of Afghan refugees.

We call upon the international community to:

- Continue to equitably respect the principles of voluntary return in conditions of safety and dignity, recognizing that immediate return may not be possible to all parts of the country in light of ongoing insecurity affecting conditions for sustainable reintegration. The voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of the Afghan refugee population is one of the important elements to the overall stability and sustainable development of Afghanistan and the region;
- Support the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its commitment to create the necessary conditions for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in the country with emphasis on youth empowerment, education, livelihoods, social protection and infrastructure;
- Advocate inclusion into the Government of Afghanistan's development planning, the needs of all displaced Afghans, including refugees currently in neighbouring countries and outside the region;
- Implement lasting solutions for Afghan refugees within the framework of the SSAR through supporting concrete initiatives in the respective national project portfolios, and support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to implement the Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package for Afghan Refugees (EVRRP) as an innovative way to enhance sustainable return and reintegration;
- Support the mutually aligned policies, strategies and plans of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran on voluntary repatriation and reintegration in the country of origin, as well as assistance and continued protection for refugees in host countries;
- Urge donors, development and humanitarian actors, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society to render their unequivocal support to enhancing reintegration and absorption capacity in the areas of return in Afghanistan, to promote broadening of the donor base, as well as to support refugees directly to improve their living conditions and host communities in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan;
- Promote the dialogue with the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and UNHCR, as well as within the wider international community, to facilitate early voluntary return of Afghan refugees and their temporary management in host countries as part of Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR); and
- In the spirit of solidarity, open channels for solutions in third countries such as legal migration, enhanced resettlement and family reunification opportunities in third countries.

We express our gratitude to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for supporting the organization of the high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation and reiterate the key role of UNHCR in this situation.

7 October 2015