

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
71<sup>st</sup> Session of the Executive Committee  
Palais des Nations, Geneva  
5. – 9. October 2020**

**General Debate  
STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF ICELAND  
*- Check against delivery -***

**H.E. Mr. Harald Aspelund  
Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations, Geneva**

**Mr. Chairman, Mr. High Commissioner,**

Let me begin by thanking the High Commissioner for his opening statement. Iceland appreciates the leadership the High Commissioner and UNHCR have shown in protecting those most vulnerable in the face of the pandemic.

COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our lives, but most of us have a home, a family to rely on, or can depend on support from the state we live in. Refugees cannot socially distance, do not always have access to water and sanitation to prevent transmission and are the first to suffer with any reduction of services. Host countries have done an extraordinary job, not only in attempting to manage the pandemic but also in their efforts to take care of refugees in particularly vulnerable positions. For UNHCR, an agency that as you highlighted High Commissioner depends on close proximity to the people it serves, adaptability has been key.

Iceland has for its part, put together two holistic COVID-19 packages containing both funding for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan, including UNHCR, and the UN Response and Recovery Fund, as well as other multilateral and bilateral actions.

Iceland continues to appreciate UNHCR's work in not only responding to the pandemic, but also to a world faced with unprecedented and escalating humanitarian needs. UNHCR and its staff show everyday tireless commitment and dedication, often in difficult and dangerous circumstances, to protect and assist those who are forced to flee. Iceland is pleased to support UNHCR as one of Iceland's priority organizations in the humanitarian field through flexible and predictable funding. We are pleased to have now entered into a second multi-year agreement that was signed by our Foreign Minister this past February with an increased annual core contribution to support your important work.

**Mr. Chairman**

We continue to emphasize the importance of a strong focus on women and girls, that are disproportionately affected in forced displacement situations. In the face of the pandemic, this impact may be even higher, underlining the importance of UNHCR mainstreaming gender equality across all its work and ensuring that sufficient resources are dedicated to its work in this field.

We also reiterate the importance of action to support LGBTI+ refugees, a group whose overall protection situation remains a major concern and may also be faced with even higher risks associated with the pandemic. We will do our part to support those refugees targeted simply for who they are and continue to emphasize that UNHCR should prioritize assistance to those most vulnerable and facing the greatest protection risks around the world, including women and girls and LGBTI+ refugees.

**Mr. Chairman**

Iceland has not only stepped up to back the international response to COVID-19 that supports refugees and host communities worldwide. We also shoulder our responsibility at home and in so doing, honour our Global Refugee Forum commitment. Despite delays due to COVID-19, our commitment remains to welcome in 2020 and 2021 an increased number of refugees through our resettlement program, compared to 2019. The expected increase between 2019 and 2021 will be roughly 33%, which is again a substantial increase from previous years. This increase is considerable for a small population like ours.

**Finally, Mr. Chairman**

We are pleased to inform the Executive board and the High Commissioner that Iceland has now completed its domestic accession procedures to the Statelessness Conventions, and we foresee to become a party to the conventions this year.

It also gives me great pleasure to participate here for the first time as a proud member of the Executive board of UNHCR. For us, this is an affirmation that Iceland is and will continue to be a strong supporter of UNHCR and its important work. We must all do our part for a strong and collective response to all those in need.

I thank you.