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Address by
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entitled

Forcibly displaced people: opportunities and
responsibilities for the international community

delivered on the occasion of
High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM)

Geneva, 14 December 2021

Check against delivery.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi,

Co-Chairs,

Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Two years of crisis

It's my pleasure to welcome you to the High-Level Officials Meeting today. It's two years since we last met in Geneva for the first Global Refugee Forum. Let's take ourselves back to December 2019, if we can. It was cold and wet. Much the same as this year in fact. But it was a very different world back then. A world without COVID-19. It's hard to think back to that time. The virus is everywhere now, while the measures taken to contain the pandemic have severely impacted our lives.

In the midst of this global emergency, we must not lose sight of other problems overshadowed by the pandemic and that there are many people who have been forgotten. Refugees, forcibly displaced persons and people living in crisis-hit regions have been directly affected by the virus. But they have also borne the brunt of the economic and social fallout and measures taken to tackle the pandemic.

2. More displaced persons than ever before

Armed conflicts, persecution, violence and the effects of climate change have led to the number of displaced people rising to 84 million in the course of this year. This is an unprecedented number. The vast majority are internally displaced persons. Most of those fleeing across borders stay in neighbouring countries. Eighty-six per cent of refugees are being hosted in developing countries, putting the countries and communities concerned under enormous pressure.

Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky said, "without home, life is torture". But what do forcibly displaced people actually need? And what are the needs of the countries hosting them? These are some of the questions we need to address at this High-Level Officials Meeting:

- We must increase our joint assistance for refugees and support countries facing major challenges in offering temporary refuge to displaced persons.
- We must press ahead with implementing the measures adopted at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum despite and indeed because of COVID-19.
- And we need to identify areas where extra refugee assistance is urgently needed, especially in response to the pandemic and its impacts.

3. Effective action grounded in evidence-based policy

Evidence-based policymaking is essential if we are to use our limited resources effectively. We need to know which measures work and which do not. Any action we take, however well-meaning, should not cause more suffering than the issues we are trying to address. The UNHCR's Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report provides reliable information and outlines the progress made:

- The number of partners contributing to refugee responses, for example, increased threefold between 2016 and 2020.
- There has also been an increase in financial and material support provided to low-income countries in particular.
- And we swiftly and successfully responded to the changing circumstances caused by COVID-19 last year, not just by adapting existing projects, but also by allocating new funding to international cooperation work.

4. Fair allocation and shared responsibility

But current trends also indicate that meeting the objectives laid down in the Global Compact on Refugees also requires greater predictability and fairness in allocating displaced people between countries. The approaches put forward at the UNHCR preparatory roundtables held in advance of this conference are promising. We now need to establish:

- how the proposed initiatives can be implemented on a large scale,
- how measures can be adapted in different settings to ensure that they have an impact on the ground,
- and how burdens and responsibilities can effectively be shared out over the long term.

5. Switzerland's role

As the host state for a number of UN organisations and the birthplace of international humanitarian law, Switzerland is proud to be co-hosting this year's High-Level Officials Meeting.

- Switzerland has also renewed its promise to take in up to 1,600 refugees under its 2022/2023 resettlement programme.
- And Switzerland continues to be proactive in the field of education. Over half of displaced people are children, and many girls, in particular, never go back to school, which represents a serious setback to efforts to address gender inequality. Switzerland has responded to this situation by launching the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, fulfilling the pledge it made in 2019. The hub brings a range of stakeholders together with the aim of raising funds and working to meet the educational needs of crisis-affected and displaced children.
- Finally, we need to remember that climate change is one of the main factors driving migration. And the devastating effects of climate change are likely to cause further population displacement in future. Switzerland has been investing in innovation and new technologies over a number of years. In June this year, Switzerland and the UNHCR launched the Geneva Technical Hub which aims to harness these recent developments for the benefit of refugees and reduce the environmental impact of humanitarian action.

6. Learning from each other and coordinating efforts

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, Switzerland stands by its commitments, in line with its humanitarian tradition, despite and indeed because of the pandemic. Let's ensure that we don't abandon forcibly displaced people.

Let's use the next two days to learn from each other and coordinate our efforts. Let's leverage the power of our collective knowledge to enable everyone to live in peace and security. In the words of German poet Paul Keller, writing during the First World War, "home isn't just a space to live, nor does it stand for friendship or love – home is peace." Let that be our motivation. Thank you for listening.