

Statement by Mr. Sadegh Rezadoust
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In the name of God

Excellences, Ministers, Esteemed Representatives,
Mr. Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Esteemed Chairperson

I wish to take this opportunity and congratulate Mr. Grandi on the extension of his tenure as the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees and wish him all the success in this important humanitarian endeavour.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been a longstanding supporter of UNHCR's mandate and amongst the main host countries in the world that have been contending with the refugee crisis for decades. My government has endeavoured to afford services for refugees within the country, in compliance with its international commitments, and in some cases has even exceeded its fair share.

Although in the opening remarks of the High Commissioner there was no distinct mention of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran being recipient and rendering services to millions of refugees and displaced persons and that it has identified and headcounted newly arrived Afghan nationals pursuant to the recent developments inside Afghanistan, however the Islamic Republic of Iran has not spared any effort to protect the refugees and the displaced persons, in particular during the difficult times of the COVID pandemic, some of which I will refer to.

Implementation of the nationwide vaccination of the foreign nationals against Covid-19 regardless of their legal status—in the midst of global vaccine shortages; registration of more than 700 thousand students in public schools -380 thousand of whom are

undocumented Afghans; education of 58 thousand university students; free insurance coverage under a special public health insurance scheme for 157 thousand of vulnerable refugees while providing access for all refugees and displaced persons to register in the public health insurance scheme; and holding literacy courses for 190 thousand foreign illiterate students are a testament to the above-mentioned approach. Moreover, following the adoption of the bill on granting citizenship to children born to Iranian mothers and foreign fathers, in 2019 -as a positive national measure to cope with statelessness, thus far Iranian nationality is granted to more than ten thousand individuals. By this prologue and cognizant of the various impediments, I avail myself of this opportunity to appreciate the efforts made by the donors, international organizations, in particular UNHCR, and those who assist us.

Iran has incurred exorbitant costs to responsibly host refugees and undocumented Afghans for decades. Throughout these long years, my country has been committed to its responsibilities substantially on domestic resources, notwithstanding the numerous economic and social challenges that ensued from the regional crises and illegal unfair unilateral coercive measures and sanctions, as well as insufficient international assistance. However, continuing this endeavour in the absence of a meaningful increase in international assistance is untenable.

Following the recent mass influx in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the internal turmoil in the country, the host communities in Iran –especially in the three border provinces- have sustained intense damage, mainly in the fields of employment, economy, and infrastructures, such as school, medical facilities, hospitals and so forth. The infrastructures of host communities are heavily overloaded. The Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCM) have escalated the foregoing situation, and we therefore need to spend our limited resources to meet other internal priorities. According to the estimations, the international resources merely cover 4 to 6 percent of the living costs of refugees in Iran. Not only international assistance should be commensurate with the number of Afghan nationals in Iran, but also their situation should not be passed into oblivion by new international crises. It is not acceptable that in the current situation, extending protection to the refugees and the undocumented by the Iranian government be encountered with the reduction of international assistance, instead of a considerable rise.

According to UNHCR, the emergency situation in Afghanistan has ended and the protection and solution period has commenced, hence the 2023 budget for neighbouring countries of Afghanistan has decreased. However, Iran has launched a nationwide registration project

for new arrivals –who have entered our country since the 2021 developments in Afghanistan called "the Preparatory Process of Provisional Protection" (4P) to recognize those in actual need of protection. This advocacy-humanitarian project requires sufficient support. It is worth mentioning that without proportionate international support from the donor countries and the international organizations, it would be extremely difficult to extend their temporary residence permit or to finalize the project itself.

As the essence of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) indicates, the best durable solution for Afghan refugees is voluntary repatriation. Therefore, it is unacceptable that International organizations, repeatedly use insecurity as an excuse for not engaging with voluntary return mechanisms without considering and proposing effective programmes as durable solutions. Afghans in Iran are mostly economic immigrants or eager to emigrate to Europe and do not have a well-founded fear of being persecuted, as per the 1951 Convention and its Protocol. We favour measures and projects that are compatible with the spirit of SSAR, and in line with durable solutions, and prevent the refugees from a protracted residence in the host countries. We therefore kindly call upon the donors and international organizations that are active in the fields of employment and training to strengthen the durable solutions –prioritizing Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration and to increase their activities inside Afghanistan. Furthermore, through joint attempts made by UNHCR and us, albeit very late, the resettlement mechanism was recently re-activated. However quotas will need to be improved. Considering the number of Afghan nationals in the country, 3000 quotas for resettlement in 2022, resembles a drop in the ocean and which has not yet materialized. Besides, it seems necessary to agree upon an improved selection mechanism to assist the host country and with no particular prioritization benefiting the receiving country.

To conclude, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran believes in equitable responsibility sharing for humanitarian actions without dividing the displaced persons into “good” or “bad” categories.

Thank you for your attention