

Deputy Secretary General, Chairman, High Commissioner, ExCom members, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen:

Experienced IDP, refugee and returnee

As our main theme of yesterday and today a lot has been said about the STATELESS but also about the plight of refugees, IDPs and returnees. These are simply people like you and me who are ran away from wars, natural disasters or other calamities. Each one of them has a chilling story of their own and of fear, suffering, helplessness and more. May be not as chilling, but my little story is just one of them.

In January of 1991, at the break of the civil war in my Country, Somalia, my family and I became **IDPs** within our Capital City, Mogadishu. Here is where I went to University, lived and worked, earned a decent living and started a family. All of a sudden, we were on the other side town hungry, homeless and mostly under the mercy of relatives. The change was not only painful but also shocking and degrading.

In Mogadishu, the first war took a little less than a month and died down. However, towards the end of that year, a bitter clan fighting for power flared up to last for four long months. Because of indiscriminate falling shells and flying bullets, security conditions in Mogadishu became unbearable. We fled to Kenya and then to Uganda to become **refugees** there. During US led Operation Restore in December 1992 and the subsequent UN Operations in Somalia of 1993-95 we came back home as **returnees**. So, ladies and gentlemen, my family and I had some real life experience of being IDPs, refugees and returnees.

What is more, not many Somalis would raise their hands to say they have not been affected by any of above. It is estimated that one in three Somalis now lives abroad either as refugees or citizens of countries that welcomed them. While the cross boarder exodus has indeed slowed

down, there still remains a significant number of Somali youth who risk their lives to take the treacherous journey across the seas to Europe.

However, IDP numbers are currently on the rise. As of end of August 2019, around 2.8 million people are of concern to UNHCR in Somalia. These include 2,648,000 IDPs. They are concentrated on the periphery of big urban centers like Mogadishu. They receive some ever dwindling humanitarian supplies and services. They mainly provide unskilled labor to the towns and cities around which they live to earn a living.

Also of concern to UNHCR are 128,029 returnees from Kenya and Yemen. It is worth noting that many Somali refugees have returned a result of the November 2013 Tripartite Agreement between the Government of Somalia, Kenya and UNHCR governing the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees living in Kenya as well as the ongoing political crisis, violence and instability in Yemen. According to UNHCR, surprising though this may be, there are 17,546 refugees and 17,494 asylum seekers.

As of our main theme, Statelessness, I believe Maha's strong message yesterday on the issue has taken many of us by surprise. Coincidentally, yesterday, as I came to the main gate of this compound I showed the security officer my UN Event Pass on my phone. He said "sir, can I see your passport or national ID" and I was turned away because I left my documents at the hotel. My colleague was allowed to get in because he had his passport. Imagine when as a child you are denied to join school games, to go to university as young adult and to apply for a job or travel as an adult. Yes, that hurts and hurts immensely. I personally learned a lot from Maha's story and live interview and I think leaders of world nations owe her and others like her a sincere apology. Not only that but to ensure to put the right policies in place to remove such tyrannies and degradation to human dignity.

The question is what can we do to help the situation? The Deputy Secretary General, the Chairman and the High Commissioner for Refugees have all, in their opening speeches, clearly highlighted what national governments, UN Agencies and UNHCR in particular, international organizations, private sector and host communities could and should do to make life better for the needy and vulnerable in our midst and a far. Effective policies and sustainable approach are essential if we have to sensibly handle statelessness and the issues of refugees, returnees and IDPs.

In terms of policy, Somalia is a signatory to the 2017 Nairobi Declaration and is currently working closely with IGAD process to develop solutions to refugee issues in the region. This includes creating a favorable environment for refugee returnees. The Federal Government of Somalia enacted the *National Action Plan on Durable Solutions for Somali Returnees and IDPs 2018-2020*. We have made remarkable progress on the commitments made in the Nairobi Declaration Plan of Action 2017. Good examples are development of policies and legislation, reintegration of returnees, access to education in public schools by refugee children, and according socio-economic rights to refugees. Efforts to ensure effective inclusion of refugees and other Population of Concern (PoCs) into the national system, development of the Refugee Act for Somalia and drafting of engagement frameworks for urban refugees and statelessness in cooperation with UNHCR are all in progress.

Further, Somalia is committed to protecting the various groups affected by displacement. In addition to legislations on refugees, asylum seekers and the

stateless, other three important legal instruments to ensure effective implementation of the protection for the displaced have been completed awaiting cabinet approval. These are The National Policy on Refugee-returnees and IDPs, the Interim Protocol on Land Distribution and The National Eviction Guidelines. Plans are also underway to develop Biometric Identity management Systems for all refugees by the first quarter of 2020. The objective is to register all refugees and asylum seekers and provide them with legal documentation throughout Somalia. Given the movement of displaced people and increased rural-urban migration in Somalia, the Government, in consultation with UNHCR, is in the process of drafting and developing Urban Refugee Policy with comprehensive approach towards social and economic inclusion and empowerment of refugees.

With the realization that the problem of statelessness remains a global challenge with devastating impact on the lives of millions and in contribution to the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014-2024, the Government of Somalia commits to conduct and publish a quantitative study to better understand the situation of stateless groups and individuals and groups at risk of statelessness living in its territory with a view of finding solutions to their plight. Somalia also commits to accede to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and to the 1961 Convention Relating to the reduction of statelessness.

Just before I conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Federal Government of Somalia, I wish to express my appreciation to the International community, and UNHCR in particular, for an unwavering commitment and support to Somalia and for their effort in providing protection, support and assistance to those affected by displacement. To our host I say thank you for organizing this amazing conference.

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