

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
70th Session of the Executive Committee
Palais des Nations, Geneva
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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, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by thanking the High Commissioner for his opening statement. Iceland shares the concerns expressed in the statement and appreciates the insights on the way forward.

As crises become increasingly protracted, we are confronted with refugee situations of growing complexity. Protection needs are rising globally, with over 70 million currently displaced worldwide.

Iceland commends UNHCR for its efforts in responding to these unprecedented and escalating humanitarian needs. And let me express our appreciation and gratitude to UNHCR and its staff for their tireless commitment and dedication to protect and assist those who are forced to flee. Your work is now more important than ever.

Mr. Chairman

In crises, we must not forget the most vulnerable, who often face multiple barriers in accessing protection.

We all know that women and girls are disproportionately affected in forced displacement situations. While much has been done in the past few years, we still need to step up our efforts in responding to the critical needs of women and girls.

We therefore urge UNHCR to promote gender equality across all its work, and ensure that sufficient resources are dedicated to such efforts.

Our commitment to leaving no one behind must also include action to support LGBTI refugees, a group whose overall protection situation remains a major concern. With little improvements over the past year, LGBTI refugees continue to face high levels of discrimination and harassment, including physical assaults.

Iceland encourages UNHCR to prioritize assistance to those most vulnerable and facing the greatest protection risks around the world, such as LGBTI refugees.

Mr. Chairman

Iceland too has assumed its share of responsibility: by supporting refugees and host communities worldwide, as well as by hosting refugees. And we remain committed.

Our new Policy for International Development Cooperation for 2019 – 2023, approved by parliament last May, sets the tone for our continued partnership with UNHCR, as one of Iceland's priority organizations in the humanitarian field. The policy includes commitment to provide flexible and predictable funding. And, Iceland is pleased to be able to support UNHCR with multiyear funding, including multi-year support to the Syria crisis – as a part of our largest ever humanitarian commitment.

Iceland also remains committed to helping meet global resettlement needs, and to these ends we have been scaling up our resettlement programme. This year we have welcomed 74 refugees to Iceland, both Syrians and LGBTI refugees previously hosted in Kenya. This is a substantial increase from last year. In addition, more

and more people are annually granted international protection in Iceland after applying for asylum. This year more than 185 individuals have so far been granted protection in Iceland, which is a considerable increase from the years before. These might not seem to be large numbers, but with our small population, they certainly are.

Iceland strives to demonstrate best practices in resettlement, by creating a welcoming atmosphere, pre-departure counselling and cultural orientation. We are constantly working on improving our asylum procedures and our resettlement programme, so we can provide better services and support to persons of concern. More municipalities are getting involved in

the resettlement programme, and civil society is more engaged than before.

Finally, Mr. Chairman

Let me take this opportunity to inform you that Iceland has taken the first steps towards membership of UNHCR's Executive Committee, with the adoption of a resolution at the Economic and Social Council in New York in July. We look forward to a continued constructive partnership with UNHCR, as a full member of ExCom going forward.

Also, in line with the thematic focus of this year's ExCom meeting, I want to convey to you the intention of my Government of acceding to the Statelessness Conventions in the near future.

To conclude, let me once more affirm that Iceland is and will continue to be a strong supporter of UNHCR. We very much look forward to participating in the Global Refugee Forum in December and have high hopes for a strengthened collective response to refugee situations.

I thank you.