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In the Name of God

Statement to be delivered by H.E. Mr. Rahmani Fazli,
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at the 70th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's
Programme

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Mr. Chairman, High Commissioner, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is ^{now} ~~almost~~ ^{long} 40 years that the Islamic Republic of Iran ^{has been hosting} ~~continues~~ to host a huge number of refugees, mostly from Afghanistan. My country has prevented their rush towards ^{others} ~~European~~ borders at tremendous cost, hence playing a crucial part in containing the refugee problem at the global level, despite lack of adequate and proportionate assistance from the international community.

According to the recent report of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, about 84% of the world refugees are still hosted by developing countries, which is conspicuously in contradiction with fair and equitable burden and responsibility-sharing in protecting refugees as a global shared responsibility. To sustainably host and sufficiently protect refugees, the way must be paved for a more equitable distribution of this population throughout the world. In accordance with article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." It is not defensible that while certain developing countries shouldering an unbearable burden due to hosting large number of refugees, some others instead of burden sharing through hosting refugees try to set the refugee protection standards higher. This trend only places more and more burden on the shoulders of those developing countries which are hosting great number of refugees.

The Islamic Republic of Iran calls for further effort by the international community to resolve the protracted refugee situations, demanding an end to

the policies that have caused the concentration of refugees in a few developing countries including Iran. We hope the Global Refugee Forum, which is to convene for the first time in December this year, will move forward in this direction and ease pressure on host countries as the most significant objective of the Global Compact on refugees by realizing the principle of equitable burden and responsibility-sharing and making a real change in the current unjust responsibility sharing arrangements for refugees.

Another significant issue I would like to highlight here is striking the right balance between protecting refugees and seeking durable solutions for them. Iran's bitter experience as demonstrated by statistics shows that attempts at providing refugees with further support and assistance has not led to durable solutions through voluntary repatriation of refugees to the countries of origin or their resettlement in third countries.

As emphasized in a number of international instruments and resolutions, the most preferred solution for refugee problem is voluntary repatriation to countries of origin. Voluntary repatriation is also the sturdiest pillar of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). Against this backdrop, we see that the international community and UNHCR's focus is on projects to support livelihood and integration of refugees in Iran and as a consequence, we see a very small number of Afghan refugees who have voluntarily repatriated from Iran to Afghanistan in recent years. It is noteworthy that granting meager financial aid to refugees fails to motivate repatriation. In such a context, we expect the international community, the government of Afghanistan and the UN Refugee Agency to focus their plans and projects on voluntary repatriation of refugees from Iran and their sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Notwithstanding the unlawful and inhuman US sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to provide the refugees with the equal services as it does to the Iranians. To make a mention of some of these services we can highlight that

- 480,000 refugee and undocumented students studying in Iranian schools for free;
- Issuance of identity documents through a project entitled Amayesh 13
- Providing the possibility of obtaining driver's licenses;
- Providing equitable access to courts of Justice;
- Vaccination and delivering primary health care for mothers and children;
- Health insurance coverage for all refugees just the same as Iranian nationals while 92,000 vulnerable refugees receiving charge-free insurance and healthcare services specific to special patients with the support of UNHCR;
- 16,500 students studying at Iranian universities;
- 250,000 refugees granted facilities and temporary permits for legal employment

Mr. Chairman;

The Islamic Republic of Iran has progressive laws to protect citizens which preclude statelessness to a great extent. Under Article 976 of Iran's civil code, the babies born to Iranian women married to foreign nationals may acquire Iranian nationality. Around 12,000 of such individuals have been conferred Iranian nationality over the past 10 years. As a very impressive breakthrough, the Islamic Constit^{utive}~~utive~~ Assembly approved, just a few days ago, a new piece of legislation which would pave the way for conferring Iranian nationality to children born of Iranian mothers with foreign husbands. This legislation, which is to become enforceable law upon endorsement by the Council of Guardians, will contribute significantly to statelessness of new generations of girls and boys with foreign fathers. ^{remaining}

In the meantime In order to identify undocumented Afghan couples and issue identity documents for the children born into such marriages, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has been requested to call on its diplomatic

and consular missions in Iran to provide the requisite documents for their stateless individuals residing in Iran.

Mr. Chairman,

The inhuman unilateral coercive measures by the United States have impacted the living conditions of refugees in fields of education, health and livelihood and the capacity of the Islamic Republic of Iran to serve refugees. The Islamic Republic of Iran thus calls upon the international community to condemn these cruel actions and hold the perpetrator accountable. The situation has made many refugees seek other ^{choices} venues including departing Iran for other destinations beyond our borders.

We are concerned that the refugees aggravating living conditions resulting from reckless inhuman sanctions would only play into the hands of transnational organized criminal groups, drug-trafficking mafia and extremist groups to abuse their vulnerabilities for their evil purposes including departing Iran for other destinations beyond our borders.

In conclusion, I express my appreciation for the international aids and UNHCR contribution, and call for an urgent action to provide necessary funds for meeting the increasing needs of refugees and the delivery of humanitarian aid to these vulnerable people and their host communities.

Thank you very much for your attention.