

Statement by India at the General Debate of the 71st Annual Session of UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) [05 to 09 October 2020] delivered by Mr. Animesh Choudhury, First Secretary. (Geneva, 07 October, 2020)

Thank You Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, we wish High Commissioner Grande a full and speedy recovery.

Mr. Chair,

2. India congratulates you on your election and appreciates your efforts in ably guiding the discussions in this session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR. We also appreciate the remarks made by the Executive Director of UNICEF during this session.

Mr. Chair,

3. The delegation of India thanks the High Commissioner for Refugees for his opening statement placing particular emphasis on the global situation of forced displacement in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Chair,

4. The statement by the High Commissioner was quite comprehensive outlining UNHCR's global response to support refugees, internally displaced persons, host communities and host governments during this unprecedented crisis. The statement also highlighted the economic consequences of the pandemic on refugees and their host communities. We also thank the High Commissioner for updating the membership on the management of the

organization. We appreciate the efforts of UNHCR in deepening the partnerships with the global financial institutions including the World Bank in ensuring flow of funds during this crisis.

Mr. Chair,

5. It is alarming to note that the total number of newly displaced people has doubled in the last decade and is expected to further increase by 2021. The growth in these numbers unfortunately continues to outpace the rate at which solutions are being found.

6. We agree with the High Commissioner's assessment that the key lesson from this pandemic crisis has been the need for better forecasting risks and prepare responses accordingly. We appreciate that 52% of the 2020 budget of UNHCR has already been funded. We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped UNHCR's plans in a significant way. The pandemic has further exacerbated humanitarian needs and put immense pressure on the humanitarian system. Low and middle-income countries, which host more than 85 per cent of the world's refugees, are doubly exposed to these effects. We appreciate that, UNHCR is presently scaling up its response to mitigate the pandemic's impact on persons of concern, globally.

Mr. Chair,

7. The affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees as a voluntary, apolitical, non-prescriptive and cooperative action oriented framework premised on national ownership is a milestone step in the right direction.

Mr. Chair,

8. We take positive note of the efforts taken towards overall organizational transformation of UNHCR being implemented around eight pillars, each of

which will strengthen the organization's effectiveness and efficiencies, ensure greater impact with the resources entrusted to it, and increase accountability to persons of concern and member States. The importance being accorded on decentralisation, increasing efficiency and making the Results Based Management tool as a key priority are noteworthy steps. We believe that such efforts would result in a more agile, effective and efficient results oriented office fully governed by and accountable to the Member States.

9. We request UNHCR to continue to help build, strengthen and use national capacities for protection and humanitarian action and increasingly work with local responders for ensuring localization of solutions and ownership of the process.

Mr. Chair,

10. Throughout history, India has welcomed refugees from all over the world despite our own developmental and security related challenges. Let me emphatically state that for some of the refugee communities in India, they would have lost their heritage, culture and even language but for India nurturing and protecting these communities under our pluralistic framework. We continue to host them, entirely, using our own resources. We are a key international development partner and through our sustained and growing efforts continue to make contributions to helping find long term and durable solutions to the refugee problem by addressing issues through building and strengthening the capacities of states. The humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations undertaken by India are statements of capability as much as responsibility.

Mr. Chair,

11. We take this opportunity to renew India's commitment to the UNHCR in fulfilling its mandate and look forward to productive outcomes through constructive engagement during this 71st session of the Executive Committee.

Thank You.