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Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Désirée SCHWEITZER

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G e n e r a l D e b a t e

Thank you, Mister Chair.

Austria aligns itself with the statements of the European Union and the Group of Friends of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness.

High Commissioner,

Let me start to congratulate you on your recent re-election; we are very happy that you will continue to lead UNHCR for another two and a half years.

Mister Chair,

2022 has been another year of mounting challenges for UNHCR in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs around the world. The vastly growing number of forcibly displaced persons has reached the sad record high of one hundred million.

We are very grateful to the High Commissioner and his outstanding team for their unbroken efforts in helping and protecting millions of beneficiaries. Many of them would otherwise have been deprived of the most basic conditions for a safe and dignified life.

Severe human rights violations, political oppression, civil strife, armed conflict and war are continuing to uproot millions of people, forcing them from their homes, separating them from their loved ones, and stripping them of all means of livelihood. Political solutions for almost all protracted displacement situations are further away than ever before.

Mister Chair,

Austria condemns in the strongest terms the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression committed by Russia against Ukraine. This includes the attempted illegal annexations of Ukrainian territory, which Austria considers null and void, and the most recent missile attacks

against Ukrainian cities. We call upon Russia to immediately cease all military actions, withdraw all troops from Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders.

We call upon all parties to the conflict, but in particular upon the Russian Federation, to strictly abide by their obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. This includes the obligation to grant full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and guarantee the safety of humanitarian corridors and workers.

Austria's full solidarity is with Ukraine. We take our responsibility seriously to alleviate the suffering of the displaced people from Ukraine and bring them to safety. This applies in particular to vulnerable persons, such as women, children, sick persons and persons with disabilities.

Since the beginning of the war, more than 440,000 displaced persons from Ukraine have entered Austria, of whom more than 81,000 chose to remain and have been registered in our country. Austria has provided assistance, *inter alia*, through the evacuation of orphans, care workers and their children to our territory.

We have pledged to transfer 2,000 displaced persons from Moldova as well as 500 displaced persons from Poland to Austria in order to also support Ukraine's particularly burdened neighbouring states. Furthermore, Austria has contributed 3.5 million euros to the UNHCR operation in Ukraine.

Mister Chair,

The war in Europe has not turned us blind to humanitarian crises and displacement situations in other regions of the world. On a positive note, we welcome that Côte d'Ivoire has peacefully resolved its conflict after two decades, allowing more than 310,000 Ivorian refugees to voluntarily return home.

In the course of this year, Austria has, *inter alia*, provided funding to the UNHCR operations in Niger, Libya, Tunisia and Afghanistan as well as the latter's neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees, in particular Iran and Pakistan. We recognise that developing countries host the vast majority of refugees and we are grateful for their continuous solidarity and generosity.

In total, Austria has so far provided financial contributions to UNHCR in the amount of 17,9 million USD.

Mister Chair,

Austria appreciates that gender equality remains core to UNHCR's action, and we commend the Organisation for its prioritised measures to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including by ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We value UNHCR's efforts in securing access to education for displaced and stateless children and youth. We equally welcome the Organisation's commitments on disability inclusion, *inter alia* by its targeted support to refugee children with disabilities, who were at increased risk of dropping out of school because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Austria expresses its full support for UNHCR's work in protecting forcibly displaced and stateless LGBTIQ+ persons. We are deeply concerned that some states refuse or are unable to provide protection to LGBTIQ+ persons who suffer from or are at risk of violence and abuse.

Being a party to both UN statelessness conventions and a member of the Group of Friends of the #IBelong campaign, Austria will continue to support all endeavours to end statelessness.

We warmly welcome the well-merited and timely adoption of this year's ExCom conclusion on "Mental health and psychosocial support".

Mister Chair,

Austria is the country that has processed the second highest number of asylum applications and accepted the second highest number of refugees per capita in the whole EU this year. In 2022, we have so far granted asylum to almost 8,000 refugees, subsidiary protection to more than 11,000 persons and humanitarian stay to more than 12,000 persons.

Let me conclude by reiterating the full support of Austria to the High Commissioner and the dedicated staff of UNHCR in being the lifeline and voice of refugees and forcibly displaced persons wherever they are.

Thank you very much.