

73rd session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

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Item 3: General Debate

Statement by the Republic of Latvia

Mr Chairperson, High Commissioner, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Latvia fully aligns with the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

We share the High Commissioner's concerns on how the many challenges facing the world, including armed conflict, persecution, violence, and the climate emergency, have contributed to the ever-growing number of displaced persons. This year we have reached a truly devastating milestone of over 100 million people being forcibly displaced worldwide. The mandate of UNHCR has never been more important. We welcome the dedicated work of UNHCR and its staff across the globe to provide aid to all those displaced.

In the past 7 months we have also experienced the largest refugee movement in Europe since the 2nd World War, caused by the unprovoked and unjustified military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

Latvia strongly condemns the latest attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. This yet again shows Russia's blatant disregard of international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles that guide our work.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has impacted not only Europe but the whole world, destabilising global food markets and increasing global food insecurity, driving up food prices and putting many countries at risk of famine.

We commend the work of the humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, for staying and delivering in Ukraine, for increasing their operations in the neighbouring countries and beyond in order to protect and assist people forced to flee, and for working together with other UN agencies to address global food insecurity. In this regard, we cannot overestimate the

importance of cash assistance in ensuring that each person's specific needs are met in a direct and flexible manner.

Latvia has been providing all possible assistance, including humanitarian aid, to Ukraine and Ukrainians displaced due to the military invasion. We have integrated a whole-of-society approach to refugee protection with government, private sector, civil society and local community all working in complementarity. Latvian people have expressed incredible solidarity with Ukraine, including by collecting private donations, working as volunteers and welcoming Ukrainian refugees in their homes.

As of 11 October, 39'729 Ukrainians fleeing the war have officially been registered in Latvia, 12'263 of them – children. This means that Ukrainian refugees now constitute about 2% of the whole population of Latvia.

The Government and people of Latvia will continue to support Ukrainian refugees for as long as necessary. Nonetheless, the key aim of the vast majority of the refugees residing in Latvia is to return to Ukraine and to their homes, and help rebuild the country. However, this will not be possible for as long as the Russian aggression continues.

Only ending this senseless war can truly help the people of Ukraine, and everyone across the globe who has been affected by food insecurity. We call on Russia to immediately cease its use of force, unconditionally withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine, and stop its attempts to illegally annex regions of Ukraine.

Thank you.