

“Global Refugee Forum”

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Salle des Assemblées
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Statement

**Mr. Christophe Poirel
Director for Human Rights
Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law
Council of Europe**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to express my gratitude to High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis for the invitation and congratulate them for the organisation of this event.

I am honoured to address the first Global Refugee Forum on behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe, which brings together 47 European states representing over 800 million people, defends and promotes democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, has long been working on the protection of refugees. I would like to mention the Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe adopted in 2017.

The European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, which oversees its implementation, constitute the cornerstone of the human rights protection system in Europe.

Other Council of Europe instruments and bodies provide a wide range of standards aimed at protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and supervise their implementation. We support our member States to ensure that the human rights of all persons within their jurisdiction, including refugees are protected. The most recent example is the handbook just published on alternatives to immigration detention and the work under way on family-based care for unaccompanied children.

The effective implementation of human rights standards is an increasingly challenging task. In Europe we see a trend towards the hardening of states' attitudes regarding refugees' rights while a security approach increasingly prevails.

Time has come for enhancing multilateral cooperation, for increasing synergies, to ensure that the fundamental rights of those who had to flee their countries of origin due to wars or other reasons are respected. The well-recognised acquis of human rights standards of the Council of Europe in the larger international cooperation context, such as this Forum, could be a good basis to enhance our collective efforts.

Our long-standing cooperation with UNHCR dates back decades and has developed in a real partnership. With our joint work on the ground: with joint awareness raising training activities in different Council of Europe member states.

It is in this spirit that the Council of Europe put forward its written comments to the Global Compact on Refugees in June 2018, and it is with this conviction that we are ready to actively engage in the aim of this Forum.

I am pleased to announce that the Council of Europe is ready to take up the role of co-sponsor in the field of education, by putting forward its successfully developed European Qualification Passport for Refugees. This initiative represents a real added value not only in the field of education.

May I also refer to the pledges made by the Council of Europe during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness that took place in Geneva on 7th October.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I noted at the beginning, we have multiple standards and we face increasing challenges to implement them. We must unite our forces even more and engage in real partnerships. It is our duty to prove that effective multilateralism is a reality. The Council of Europe remains a reliable partner in the work ahead of us.