

Statement by India at the First Global Refugee Forum- Delivered by Ambassador Mr. Rajiv K. Chander, Permanent Representative of India to U.N. (Geneva, 17-18 December, 2019)

Mr. High Commissioner, Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

My delegation wishes to thank the Swiss Confederation for co-hosting the First Global Refugee Forum with UNHCR and the Co-conveners. We take this opportunity to extend the warmest greetings of my Government to all the participants.

2. Throughout history, India has welcomed refugees from all over the world. The Zoroastrians who had sought refuge in India from 7th century onwards, now known as the Parsis are a vibrant and important community in our democratic polity. The Jews who were persecuted in the 16th century had sought refuge in Cochin in South India where the synagogue, they built, exists to date.

3. Closer to our times, thousands and thousands have sought refuge in India from some of our neighbouring countries, including more than 10 million in 1971 from erstwhile East Pakistan, after which Bangladesh was born.

4. 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.

5. Consequently, given our rich history, India has always welcomed those who were persecuted and provided succour to them. India has always been supportive of initiatives in this regard, despite our own developmental and security related challenges.

6. We are a key international development partner and through our sustained and growing efforts also 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. Our development partnership, a key instrument in our foreign policy, in the past few years, has seen considerable expansion in its scope and reach beyond the neighbourhood and Africa to reach most developing countries through a range of developmental assistance and capacity-building programmes under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) to build capacity and promote resilience.

7. The humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations undertaken by us in the past decade are statements of capability as much as of responsibility. Our development partnership and humanitarian assistance, being strongly inter-linked, go hand in hand as they should and as is being increasingly realised.

8. Recently, at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York in September 2019, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi launched the Global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure which is a path breaking initiative for mitigating the impact of climate induced disasters that could lead to outflow of large numbers of people from affected areas.

Mr. High Commissioner,

9. We categorically and unequivocally reject the unwarranted and gratuitous comments made in this forum by the Prime Minister of Pakistan which only reflects visceral and pathological prejudice against India. In addition to being disrespectful of the mandate of UNHCR and the spirit of the Compact, it is based on a poor understanding of the responsibility of co-convenership

which is to mobilise political support not politicise and make a call for partnership not partisanship. It is another dismal attempt by Pakistan to interfere in the internal affairs of India; to present an alarmist situation of the region; and abuse international fora. Pakistan is a self-proclaimed champion of human rights that has shrunk the size of its own minority community from 23% in 1947 to 3% today by subjecting them to draconian blasphemy laws, systemic persecution, blatant abuse and forced conversions. My Government is only dealing with resultant problem through democracy and due process, things alien to Pakistan. Citizens of India do not need anyone else to speak on their behalf, least of all those who have built an industry of terrorism from the ideology of hate. It would serve Prime Minister Khan and his country well if he focuses on the welfare of his own people and country.

10. We take this opportunity to renew and reaffirm our firm commitment to working together in the true spirit of global solidarity to find an end to the refugee problem.

Thank you.