

**GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM****CLOSING PLENARY SESSION 18 December 2019****High-level closing panel****SPEECH OF COMMISSIONER URPILAINEN**

High Commissioner, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the UNHCR, the six co-organising countries and as well as all the other governmental and non-governmental participants for the Global Refugee Forum, and for making it together successful. We will continue to work together to help those in need of international protection.

Let me first acknowledge the tremendous efforts made by the countries represented today, to host and assist thousands - and sometimes million - of refugees. They did it under sometimes very difficult circumstances; it was their choice to respond to the call of duty.

I wish to pay tribute and express my recognition and that of the European Union.

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Last week, during my very first trip as European Commissioner, I went to visit the Kalobeyei refugee settlement in Kenya. This visit impacted me greatly. I would like to start by quoting parts from a poem performed to us by Abol Malueth, a young girl living in the Kalobeyei refugee settlement in the Turkana region in Kenya:

*“Dance, I dance in joy. Our dreams scatter, our future tatter, but still we rise. Away with lamentation, and fake victimization. With hopes springing high, still we rise.”*

I was struck by these lines and by the people I met in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. On top was not the adversity and difficulty of their life in exile - but by their energy and hope. I visited the maternity ward that helped both refugees and the host communities. I visited the secondary school for girls in which Abol and her friends learn.

I didn't meet superhuman heroes. I met people like you and me, who try to create new lives for themselves, for their children. I witnessed the human ability to rise, to persevere and to come together. The poem is about hopes and dreams, strength and it also expresses something profoundly human and universal.

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I cited this poem because we need to listen to it. Our task is to create better futures. We come together to ensure that, for persons fleeing from of conflicts and persecutions, a new life can be created. We do this for others. But we also do this for ourselves: we are better when we do better.

In recent years, the European Union has had to tackle the issue of refugees and our discussions have been sometimes difficult. But the overall direction is clear, rooted in the Union's values and our respect for international law.

I can affirm today that the European Union will remain strongly committed to continue working together with all its Member States, with all United Nations' countries, with UNHCR and the United Nations' agencies. Together we can find solutions and responses to refugee situations, wherever they are and whatever will happen in the future.

We will do so, as we are convinced that everyone has to share responsibility in addressing a global challenge.

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The importance of international responsibility sharing is one of the key objectives of the Global Compact for Refugees. This principle has been always clear in the EU and EU Member States' policies and legislation.

True to this principle, the EU has dedicated some 80% of its 2.8 billion EUR humanitarian budget between 2018 and 2019 to interventions helping the forcibly displaced persons, as well as their host communities.

Since 2016, the EU's support to forcibly displaced persons hosted in third country has included some 8.85 billion EUR in development-focused interventions. We will continue this work in the future.

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As a teacher, I strongly believe in the importance of evidence-based decision-making and of learning together. I also believe in the importance of support that opens up new opportunities and empowers to learn and flourish.

In this perspective, I am proud that over the last five years, our total investment in refugee education outside the EU has been over 5,3 billion EUR. With this help, over 6.5 million girls and boys benefitted from educational projects between 2015 and 2018.

This is our contribution to allow a girl like Abol to proudly say, despite all, "*Generation Girl we rise*".

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The local integration in the host country is one of the three possible durable solutions. Second is the voluntary return to the origin country, in security and dignity. And the third one is the resettlement to a third country.

While the European Union is home already to 4 million of asylum seekers and refugees, our doors remain open. Our legislation supports the access of beneficiaries of international protection to education, social welfare, healthcare, accommodation, and the labour market.

Same time the EU has been supporting humanitarian evacuations of persons in need of international protection from Libya to Niger and recently also Rwanda. We work on the further resettlement or other durable solutions together through the AU-EU-UN taskforce. Resettlement will continue to be at the top of the EU agenda in the years to come.

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Let me take you back to Kenya. For the people I met there, the expectation is about receiving real protection, true solidarity and concrete hope for a truly better future. They are talented individuals who want to make it.

The concept of global solidarity is not simply about dividing respective tasks and exchanging support. It is about being partners on a long common journey. It is about supporting each other in addressing the different challenges that can arise. It is about international partnerships.

Today, once again, we are faced with record numbers of refugees in the world. Often, prospects for solutions are slim. But we are here, together facing the challenge and demonstrating global solidarity. With this, I firmly believe that, as Abol, the girl in Kenya, said, “*still we rise.*”

Thank you!