

U.S. Delegation Plenary Statement
71st Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee
Monday, October 5, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Mr. High Commissioner:

My delegation is grateful for your efforts to make this 71st Session as normal as anything can be in these abnormal times; I so wish we were all there in person.

Mr. Chairman, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the UN Charter, which, amongst many noble commitments, encourages member states to take “effective, collective measures...to [solve] international problems of a...humanitarian character.” In that spirit, just ten days ago on the margins of the UN General Assembly High-Level week, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun convened the top ten UN humanitarian donor governments – and the top UN humanitarian agencies – UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, and OCHA – to discuss humanitarian leadership, the criticality of burden sharing, and the role that all member states must play to achieve solutions in response to ever-growing humanitarian needs.

At the event, I was struck by what united the participants. First, collective action. Germany suggested that we collectively reach out to new donors to encourage them to enter the field of humanitarian donorship. The UK pointed out that only two of the permanent five members to the UN Security Council were amongst this group of donors, and that the task of aiding the more than 170 million people around the world in need of humanitarian assistance is bigger than any one of us – indeed, it is bigger than all of us. Ten donors represent 80 percent of humanitarian funding; but for several years, humanitarian budgets have been 30, 40, or even 50 percent under-funded. Nevertheless, we also recognize many smaller donors who make large contributions in relation to their size – and contrast that with some countries of means who claim the mantle of global leadership but do not show up when it counts.

Secondly, we fondly remembered a voice behind the shared message about the need to achieve solutions that eliminate human suffering and stabilize communities in crisis, thereby enhancing our collective security. Japan quoted the late former High Commissioner for Refugees Madame Sadako Ogata, who said, “Peace that exists in solely one country is no peace because every nation’s fate is interconnected.” Indeed, humanitarian solutions lie in diplomatic action – and our

respect for obligations we have each made under international humanitarian law. Diplomatic and humanitarian action is needed now more than ever.

In this vein, we spoke of our continued humanitarian generosity, which the United States is proud to lead. Last year, the United States contributed more than \$9 billion in relief for humanitarian crises – of which \$1.7 billion went to UNHCR alone. On the day of our UNGA event, the U.S. announced a collective \$980 million in additional assistance to respond to the crisis in the Sahel, for the people of South Sudan, including South Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries, and for the people of Syria both inside Syria and to refugees in the region. The week before, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited a Venezuelan refugee and migrant reception center in Brazil, where he announced \$348 million in new funding to assist displaced Venezuelans throughout the region.

Finally, we were all inspired by the remarks provided by High Commissioner Grandi, who, when commenting on his recent trip to Syria, said he had been reminded of the contrast between the extreme complexity of politics in conflict situations and the stark simplicity of people’s needs. That contrast, and those words, Mr. High Commissioner, recall the importance of burden sharing in our refugee work, which you characterized as having big imbalances. Imbalances illustrated by the outsized role of just ten donors, yes – but, just as crucial to humanitarian protection, imbalances among refugee hosting countries, some hosting millions of refugees, thereby shouldering a very big part of our collective responsibility sharing. To quote Deputy Secretary of State Biegun, “We must all work together and count on everyone to do their part...Together, we can have a profound impact.”

In closing, Mr. Chairman, let me thank all of our UNHCR colleagues for their work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR’s ability to “stay and deliver” – and to adjust your operations with your implementing partners to ensure that they, too, could stay and deliver – is indicative of the hard work and commitment to partnerships that are foundational to the work of the organization.

While I am disappointed not to be with you in person, I thank my friends and colleagues who are watching virtually.

Thank you.