

UK Statement - 72nd UNHCR Executive Committee – October 2021

[884 WORDS]

Thank you Chair.

High Commissioner, Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

To say it's been another challenging year does not begin to describe the enormity of tasks the humanitarian community have encountered in 2021. As we pass the 70th anniversary of the refugee convention we are, as ever, **deeply impressed and grateful to UNHCR staff** and partners for their extraordinary work helping millions of people caught in the most difficult and dangerous situations. You often provide vital assistance and protection at considerable personal risk. Your commitment to stay and deliver is highly commendable and the UK remains committed to supporting UNHCR financially, politically and through technical cooperation.

With forced displacement at unprecedented levels its more important now than ever to recognise and pay tribute to the huge **generosity of host nations and communities** in opening their borders and homes to those forced to flee conflict, persecution, and violence.

The **UK is firmly committed to supporting refugees and their hosts**. We pledged £205 million to the Syria Crisis in 2021, bringing our total support to over £3.7 billion since 2012 and have provided £320m for the Rohingya crisis since 2017. We also continue to provide significant levels of multiyear and un-earmarked funding to UNHCR.

The devastating impacts of **COVID-19** continue to be felt across the globe. As we feared, it is those who are already the most excluded and marginalised who are hit hardest. We applaud UNHCR for their tireless efforts to ensure access to vaccines for persons of concern *alongside* other essential humanitarian programmes. We will continue to work hard to ensure the most vulnerable, including refugees, are vaccinated. We must ensure continued collective action to tackle COVID-19 and its secondary impacts, both socio-economic and protection-related, and also ensure lessons are learnt.

As we look around the world, it is clear that nations suffering most from the **climate crisis** are also those that are the most fragile and conflict affected. Climate change acts as a cruel multiplier, making bad situations worse. The consequences of climate change hit the most vulnerable and threaten to displace millions more people. They hit **women and girls** particularly hard; from the risk of violence to the threat of child marriage.

The UK is hosting **COP26** in just a few weeks' time in Glasgow. It will bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. We hope humanitarian agencies will be part of the discussion and commend UNHCR for highlighting climate change through the work you are already doing.

Last year, the UK launched a '**Call to Action to Prevent Famine**' in the face of rising humanitarian needs. Through our G7 Presidency earlier this year, the UK secured the G7's first ever Compact to tackle the drivers of famine – helping protect people at imminent risk and address the upward trend in people needing humanitarian aid.

Two weeks ago, the UK's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention was in **Ethiopia**. He visited Tigray and saw how the deliberate destruction of facilities and objects essential to civilian wellbeing, exacerbated by a denial of humanitarian and commercial access, is driving famine risk. We must ensure humanitarian access improves. The UK condemns the expulsion of seven UN officials last week; they

were essential to providing neutral and impartial lifesaving humanitarian assistance to millions of Ethiopian citizens throughout the country. A humanitarian ceasefire is vital and we call on Tigrayan forces to cease their military operations in Amhara and Afar, and for all parties to the conflict to respect International Humanitarian Law and support unfettered access.

The security and political instability in **Afghanistan** is compounding an already dire humanitarian situation. Like others we are extremely concerned that economic collapse and reduced access to critical services could trigger a humanitarian catastrophe and lead to regional instability.

We encourage strong co-ordination and consistency across UN partners and welcome efforts already made to ensure an adequately resourced, prioritised and coordinated response. We welcome the recent visit by the High Commissioner, an important part of this. The UK is doubling aid to Afghanistan to £286 million this year of which £30 million will provide support for Afghans in the region. This includes £10 million immediately to support the refugee response and preparedness in neighbouring countries and £20 million for countries that experience a refugee influx.

We are proud of the UK's **Afghan Citizen's Resettlement Scheme**, which will provide protection for Afghan citizens identified as most at risk, particularly women and girls. We will welcome 5,000 refugees in the first year and 20,000 over the coming years.

We welcome UNHCR's ongoing commitment to **organisational reform** and have already seen clear benefits of decentralisation. We encourage UNHCR to forge ahead with plans to become an even more effective and efficient organisation with coherent priorities, effective controls and transparent decision-making, and in particular the roll out of the 2025 Risk Strategy.

Finally, December will see the **High-Level Officials Meeting of the Global Refugee Forum**. This will provide an important platform not only to take stock of progress already made, but crucially to maintain and build on the momentum generated by the Global Compact on Refugees. It will be important to identify priorities, opportunities and decision points for the next two years. The UK is looking forward to contributing to this important milestone.

Thank you