

**72nd Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's for
Refugees Programme
4-8 October 2021, Geneva
General Debate**

STATEMENT BY BULGARIA

Distinguished Chairperson,

Distinguished High Commissioner,

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement of the EU and its member states. Furthermore, we would like to add a few comments in our national capacity.

In the course of this year we marked the 70th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Thanks to this key and unique international treaty millions of lives have been saved and millions of people have been given hope for a new beginning.

We deeply regret that in the meantime in 2021 the forced displacement has reached new record levels. Upholding the Convention's spirit and fundamental principles is more urgent than ever. The Bulgarian government acknowledges the universal right to seek asylum, as well as the principle of non-refoulement as enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention.

We share the grave concern over the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the rapidly worsening humanitarian situation and the rising number of internally displaced persons and those fleeing the country in search of asylum.

Bulgaria will continue working with international partners on durable solutions for Afghan refugees including the creation of conditions for the safe and dignified repatriation and sustainable socio-economic reintegration of Afghan nationals. We reconfirm in this regard our support to the UNHCR's role in the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in the Afghan displacement situation.

In this context we also state our serious concern over attempts to instrumentalize refugees, asylum seekers and migrants as a means of putting pressure on third countries. We consider such actions to be inhumane, contrary to international law and absolutely unacceptable.

Bulgaria shares the concerns about the disproportionate effects of the pandemic particularly on women, children and persons with disabilities. The persons of concern to UNHCR are also among the worst affected by the pandemic's continuing impact. The disruption in education for refugees, particularly girls, is alarming and we add our voice to the call for ensuring their secure and regular access to education.

We commend the UNHCR for continuing to pay particular attention to the specific protection challenges and needs of woman and girls and for stepping up efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of abuse against women and girls.

We share the concerns already expressed on other occasions that the ways of delivering protection and assistance in humanitarian settings continue to be insufficiently adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Bulgaria welcomes in this regard the UNHCR's five-year action plan on disability inclusion.

Bulgaria joins its voice to the appreciation of UNHCR ability to stay and deliver, to reshape its approach and of its consistent advocacy for the inclusion of persons of concern in national vaccination plans, health responses and other services to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic.

We also welcome the UNHCR comprehensive internal reform of structures, systems and processes which contributed to the quality of the pandemic response. We equally commend the efforts to strengthen its integrity and oversight functions, risk management and programming based on results.

Bulgaria shares the view of the relevance and timeliness of the proposed ExCom conclusions on pandemic and we hope they will be adopted by consensus. We appreciate the work done so far by the Rapporteur and the UNHCR Secretariat in this sense.

We are looking forward to the High Level Officials Meeting this December, almost two years after the first Global Refugee Forum, as an opportunity to meet again and reaffirm our joint commitments as UN Member States to work together towards a global solidarity and burden and responsibility sharing. This would be an opportunity for all of us to take stock of the progress made towards achieving the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees, to identify the way forward and discuss future solutions.

It would moreover be an occasion to present the achievements in fulfilling the pledges made at the high-level segment on statelessness, which took place during the seventieth session of this Committee in 2019. We use the opportunity to inform that already in 2020 Bulgaria withdrew its reservation with regard to Art. 31 of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

Thank you, Mr Vice-Chairperson.