



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO  
THE UNITED NATIONS AT GENEVA**

**UNHCR High-Level Officials Meeting  
Plenary statement by Sierra Leone  
Geneva, 15 December 2021**

Thank you, chair

High-Commissioner, Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the UNHCR for convening this High-Level Officials Meeting. Sierra Leone recognizes that the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) Indicator Report is important, particularly in the context of the first Global Refugee Forum's focus on burden-and responsibility sharing. We stress that implementation of the GCR should be forward-looking and result-oriented. This requires full consideration of the views of the host countries built upon common and specific challenges on the ground.

In the three years since the affirmation by the General Assembly of the Global Compact on Refugees, we have witnessed considerable progress, as we heard from previous speakers. The Government of Sierra Leone is committed to protecting stateless persons or persons at risk of statelessness. Sierra Leone is one of the champion countries that acceded to the two treaties that form the foundation of the international legal framework to address statelessness – 1954 and 1961 convention on stateliness – following the launch of IBelong campaign in 2014. Sierra Leone has made considerable strides to fulfil its commitment to eradicate statelessness by launching a national action plan, undertaking nationality laws and civil registration reforms, and appointing a dedicated office to promote holistic response. We have reformed our nationality laws to allow women to confer their nationality to their children which places the country among the first few countries to put an end to gender discrimination in nationality laws since the launch of the of the UNHCR Global Campaign to end Statelessness by 2024.

Moreover, post-civil war Sierra Leone has transitioned to a host country, providing safe space to people seeking refuge in the country in line with Sierra Leone's established Refugee Act and other international standards. Sierra Leone is a shining example for current conflict-rode regions as they look towards the future. My Government in collaboration with the UNHCR continues to include all locally integrated refugees into the country's national development programmes, empower them to became self-reliant, and respond to UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

While significant strides have been made to ease pressures on host countries and increase self-reliance and solutions, there is still a need for more equitable, predictable, true burden and responsibility sharing. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the already overwhelming burden of the host countries. In the face of this challenge, we witnessed the shortage of humanitarian funding, diversion of resources and unequal supply of medicine, vaccines and therapeutics to the host countries.

My Government remains concerned about the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on refugees, including socio-professional, health and education. While some measures taken by some States to improve

the situation of refugees should be commended, some discriminatory and xenophobic practices reported in the fight against the pandemic should be deplored. In this context we appreciate UNHCR's actions aimed at relieving victims, including cash emergency assistance, home visits, psycho-social care, and safe return to school for children. And we call on States to embrace this dynamic of the inclusion and care of refugees in their national policies response to the health crisis.

The growing trend of forced displacement around the world remains a matter of concern and my continent, Africa, remains one of the continents most affected by the phenomenon. My Government strongly believes we need to address the root causes of forced displacement and calls on the international community to support endogenous African solutions in order to provide a sustainable response to African humanitarian challenges, in accordance with the principle of international solidarity advocated by the Global Compact on Refugees. UNHCR's international protection mandate should prioritize durable solutions over protracted situations by combining humanitarian action with the creation of a political environment favourable to economic and social development.

While this high-level meeting is taking stock of implementing the pledges made in the first GRF, challenges and best practices, it is necessary to have a full consideration of the existing and emerging challenges of the host countries. To this end, despite the strong political commitment shown by developing countries like Sierra Leone to increase the possibilities of durable solutions for refugees, it goes without saying that sustainable financial and technical resources are needed to achieve this goal and enable UNHCR to effectively carry out its mandate.

Successful implementation of the GCR calls for holistic and innovative solutions, voluntary repatriation remains the best solution and we welcome UNHCR's engagement with countries of origin to support the conditions for a safe, dignified and sustainable return.

Most importantly, as the pandemic has worsened the existing burden of the host countries and the humanitarian crisis, we reiterate our call to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity in order to guarantee equitable and rapid access to vaccines, diagnostics, therapies and, above all, to the technology needed to produce medicines and other health products locally.

Finally, Sierra Leone reaffirms its commitment to the objectives the GCR and will remain to be a trusted partner that will continue to support the mandate of UNHCR.

I thank you