



**Statement by Mr. Raivo KÜÜT, Undersecretary for Population and Civil society,
Ministry of Interior, at the 74rd plenary session of UNHCR's Executive Committee, 9 –
13 October 2023**

Mr Chair,

Estonia aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the EU on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Estonia commends the UNHCR for fulfilling its mandated lead role for the provision of international protection to refugees and forcibly displaced persons in increasingly complex humanitarian contexts around the world. We appreciate UNHCR's work on the ground, alleviating dire humanitarian needs, often in very difficult circumstances.

Unfortunately, we see humanitarian needs grow year by year with new crises joining existing ones. Estonia remains concerned about these numerous situations around the globe, in Sudan and Armenia as well as Afghanistan, Syria, Ethiopia, the Sahel region, Myanmar and Yemen. The number of people forcibly displaced continues to rise, stretching limited resources further.

Much of this increase has been created by Russia's ongoing war of aggression. The Russian attack on Ukraine has forced 6,3 million people to become refugees abroad and displaced 5,5 million inside Ukraine, most of them women and children. 17.6 million Ukrainians – 40 per cent of the country's population – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

The Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine is blatant violation of international law. The gravely devastating consequences of this aggression – not only for Europe but globally – cannot be overstated. The rise in food insecurity, rising food prices and energy crisis are a real and direct consequence of the Russian aggression, which affects adversely millions of already vulnerable people around the world. Russia has been weaponising food and hunger since the first days of its war of aggression against Ukraine. It is solely responsible for the global food security crisis and it is using the lives of the most vulnerable around the world as means to further its ambitions.

Estonia is doing its part to help and share the burden. We are very glad that so many Ukrainian refugees have adapted into the Estonian society. Estonia is doing everything we can in order to apply a whole of society approach to refugees – the whole society, including the government and ministries, social system, private sector and civil society is involved in order to make sure we provide an effective refugee response. In this regard, we appreciate UNHCR's support to responding to the needs of the Ukrainian refugees in Estonia and the wider region as part of the regional refugee response plan.

To date, Estonia has sent an estimated 24.6 million EUR in humanitarian aid to Ukraine. We have additionally seen an unprecedented, heart-warming and massive support for Ukraine from the Estonian private sector, civil society and citizens.

At the same time Estonia continues to be a long-time predictable donor to UNHCR. We aim to continue our unearmarked contributions to allow UNHCR to respond effectively to the many crises around the world. Most recently we provided support to alleviate the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Sudan and its neighbouring countries.

Protection of the most vulnerable such as women and children remains a priority for Estonia. In this context, I would like to highlight Russia's deliberate policy of deporting Ukrainian children to Russia and Belarus, subjugating them to pro-Russian propaganda and forceful adoption into Russian families – something that seemed inconceivable in our time, especially by a permanent member of the Security Council, is happening as we speak. While the ICC arrest warrants underscore the gravity of these war crimes, they alone cannot bring the children back. Achieving this requires cooperation with the UN, its agencies and member states in putting pressure on Russia and Belarus.

Mr. Chairperson,

As we near the second Global Refugee Forum, we see it as an important milestone for both taking stock of the commitments made as well as forging a way forward to be better prepared to deal with the challenges we face today and in the future.

Estonia commends once again the UNHCR for its tireless work to alleviate the situation of the world's most vulnerable all around the globe. Estonia is committed to assisting the UNHCR as a flexible donor and UNHCR can count on Estonia's support also in the future.

Thank you.