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**74th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commission of
the United Nations on Refugees**

**Statement by the Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the
Republic of Cyprus, Ms. Olympia Neocleous**

Geneva, 9-13 October 2023

Agenda Item 3: General Debate

Thank you Vice-Chair,
High Commissioner,

Cyprus aligns itself with the EU statement and extends its most heartfelt condolences to Israel and its people, having suffered a heinous terrorist attack. We also extend our solidarity and sympathy to the earthquake victims in Afghanistan.

Allow me to start by thanking the High Commissioner for his opening remarks, but most importantly for his and the UNHCR's commitment and extraordinary work on the ground, to support refugees and displaced people, amounting to a staggering 110 million people worldwide.

Seventy-two years on from the 1951 Refugee Convention, migration remains one of the most burning issues on our global agenda. The world is witnessing unprecedented levels of global forced

displacement triggered by armed conflict, climate degradation, inequalities and poverty, persecution and human rights' violations.

Stepping up our efforts to tackle these emergencies as well as their root causes is a pressing imperative in our interconnected world. Providing sanctuary to those in need, regardless of their nationality, race, religion, or sexual orientation and gender identity is the bedrock of our shared humanity, as well as a moral and legal responsibility.

As a result of Russia's unjustified war of aggression in Ukraine, a very grave displacement crisis has been triggered in Europe, forcing millions of Ukrainians to flee their homes, seeking safety, protection and assistance. By September 2023, Cyprus has welcomed twenty thousand of Ukrainians seeking temporary protection, a number equal to the 2.04% of the island's population.

We follow with concern the fragile humanitarian situation in Nagorno Karabakh. My government stands ready to immediately provide humanitarian assistance to the fleeing Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh and states that refugees need to be able to return to their homes in safety and dignity.

Madam/Mr. Chair

For six consecutive years, Cyprus has consistently been the EU Member State with the highest per capita number of first-time applications for international protection corresponding to 6% of the country's population.

More than 89% of the applicants for humanitarian protection to our country, are deliberately "channelled" or "pushed forward" to cross

the buffer zone into the areas effectively controlled by the Government of Cyprus, rendering this an explicit case of instrumentalising the most vulnerable of people, so as to achieve a political agenda.

Admittedly, the surge in numbers has put an extraordinary strain on Cyprus' capacities to provide adequate accommodation, services, and support for those seeking protection.

Confronted with such exceptional circumstances, we have been stepping up our response both in terms of policy as well as increasing resources and capacities.

Our national refugee policy is now geared towards:

- establishing a Vice Ministry for Immigration and Asylum, to focus exclusively on migration and asylum issues,
- improving response capacity and strengthening human resources to optimize the process of examining asylum applications' procedures,

and

- upgrading and creating new reception infrastructure,

In parallel, significant efforts are invested in promoting refugees' and asylum seekers' integration into Cypriot society. This includes access to education, health care, including mental healthcare services, and employment opportunities including vocational training programmes.

Madam /Mr Chair,

UNHCR is Cyprus' key partner in ensuring the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in accordance with EU and international standards. I would like to reassure you once again of my government's unwavering commitment to working ever so closely with the UNHCR. As part of seeking to step up our overall response in solidarity to those in need, we have modestly increased our financial contribution towards refugees causes.

As I conclude, I would like to reiterate Cyprus' commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees and to its goals. We are looking forward to the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, reaffirming our joint commitment for enhance international solidarity and cooperation in search of equitable and sustainable solutions to relieve the plight of millions of refugees.

Thank you.