

## **UNHCR Executive Committee 74th Session Statement by the Republic of Latvia**

Geneva, 10 October 2023

Mr Chair, High Commissioner, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Latvia fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to add some remarks in a national capacity.

We share the High Commissioner's concerns on how long-running crises, new outbreaks of conflict and climate emergencies have contributed to the ever-growing number of people forced to flee their homes. Now over 100 million people around the world forcibly displaced by violence, persecution, conflict and human rights violations have been forced to make impossible, even heart-braking decisions and pushed to the brink - they need our support as never before.

The scale and speed of humanitarian crisis in recent years and months has grown immensely - more than five million people driven from their homes due to continued deadly conflict in Sudan, over 100 thousand refugees arriving in Armenia in just a week after the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, more than six million Ukrainians forcibly displaced by the Russia's war against Ukraine. Refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons have lost not only their homes, but also opportunities to develop their professional careers, and their entire lives are packed into just a few travel bags.

While maintaining access for those who have been forced from their homes by conflict and persecution, Latvia is determined to protect the borders of our democratic world and stands strong against any destabilization attempts in the country and the region.

Illegal migration continues to be a very serious challenge for Latvia and for whole Europe. Belarus' cynical and inhuman instrumentalization of migrants and artificial migration route through Belarus, could lead to further attempts to destabilize societies in the Baltic region and the European Union. Hundreds of illegal migrants are trying to cross the Latvia - Belarus border every week. We are seriously alarmed by cruel business of smuggling gangs that make maximum profit from the plight of people and smuggle them across borders in a life-threatening way.

Moreover, Russia's war against Ukraine is causing serious geopolitical, economic, and humanitarian consequences far beyond Europe's borders. The war has led to one of the largest forced displacement crises since the Second World War. As of today, fifty-five thousand Ukrainians fleeing the war have been officially registered in Latvia, thousands of them – children. Latvia will support the Ukrainian people as long as it takes. In this regard, we welcome the extension of the EU Temporary Protection Scheme for people fleeing from Russia's war against Ukraine.

For the sake of Ukraine's people and our global community the Russia's senseless, unjustified war must stop.