

74th Session UNHCR Executive Committee

9-13 October 2023, Geneva

Agenda item 3 General debate

STATEMENT BY BULGARIA

Distinguished Chairperson,

High Commissioner Grandi,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bulgaria aligns with the statement of the EU and its Member States and the joint statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

Let me first express Bulgaria's deepest condolences to Israel, to the Israeli people and families. We strongly condemn the heinous terrorist attacks against Israel. Bulgaria insists that the hostages kidnapped by Hamas be released and civilians protected in line with IHL.

We also state our solidarity with and support to the people of Afghanistan, following the devastating earthquake in Herat province that took away thousands of lives and left many more injured and homeless.

This year marks the **30th Anniversary of Bulgaria's accession to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees**. We reaffirm our commitment to its application, in letter and spirit, and encourage States not parties to consider acceding to the Convention and adhering to its values and principles.

We are deeply concerned about the **continued record levels of forced displacement in 2023** and that hundreds of millions of people, significant part of which **children**, are forced to leave their homes. We deplore the high number of unscrupulous criminals, smugglers and **human traffickers** that take profit from human suffering and are abusing people on the move, putting their lives in danger.

UNHCR's mandate and role are more important than ever, and we commend UNHCR staff for their efforts to "stay and deliver", often under highly difficult circumstances. We strongly condemn all forms of violence to which humanitarian personnel are increasingly and perilously exposed.

Russia's ongoing war of aggression against **Ukraine** continues to entail huge displacement and humanitarian crisis in Europe. We deeply deplore the continuing violations of IHL, the civilian casualties and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, vital to the survival of the Ukrainian population during the upcoming winter period.

From the beginning of the war until 6 October more than 2 007 050 Ukrainians entered Bulgaria. Around 169 040 have been registered for temporary protection, and more than 55 890 are still remaining on our territory. The Bulgarian government continues to offer them access to the labour market, medical care same as for Bulgarian citizens, accommodation, social welfare assistance and education. We welcome the excellent cooperation with UNHCR in this regard.

On 4 September 2023 the Bulgarian Prime Minister established a **working group to develop a new Program for humanitarian assistance and integration of displaced persons from Ukraine** granted temporary protection in Bulgaria. The programme will provide for measures in priority areas to ensure further opportunities for good living conditions and realization of the persons granted temporary protection in Bulgaria, with the resulting rights and obligations.

Bulgaria also continues to pay attention to situations of concern in other parts of the world.

We share the grave concern over the deteriorating security, humanitarian and human rights situation in **Afghanistan** after the Taliban takeover, especially for Afghan women and girls, and the continuously growing number of Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the neighbouring countries and Europe.

Bulgaria calls for immediate cancellation of the de facto authorities' decision to prohibit female staff from working for non-governmental organizations. We encourage UNHCR to continue its advocacy in that regard. We stand for the right of women to participate in the humanitarian action, as well as in all spheres of public, social, economic, and political life.

In 2023 Bulgaria continued to support financially and further encourage the prioritised UNHCR work on enabling conditions and removing

obstacles to the voluntary repatriation of refugees and the sustainable return of IDPs in safety and dignity as well as for their reintegration.

We commend UNHCR for the archived so far progress **in the process of internal reforms and in strengthening its coordination** with other humanitarian actors. We encourage UNHCR to pay attention to risk management and to the prioritizing of efforts when deemed necessary and sustain action with a view to enforcing the zero - tolerance approach towards **sexual exploitation**, sexual harassment and abuse, fraud, corruption and other forms of misconduct.

We encourage UNHCR to support and enable the full and meaningful participation of **persons with disabilities** in+ the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies, programmes and activities related to humanitarian response.

Looking forward to the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023, we reiterate Bulgaria's commitment to the Global Compact. We are preparing to pledge our part in the global efforts for addressing and responding to the complex challenges of forced displacement.

Let me conclude, with the **seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we are celebrating this year**. The values of equality, justice and human dignity enshrined in the Declaration are as relevant today as when it was written. [As newly elected member of the Human Rights Council,] we call on all of us to stand up for human rights and commit to making the principles of the Universal Declaration a reality in our daily lives. **Everybody has the**

right to life, to live in freedom and safety and to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

Thank you.