

89th Standing Committee of UNHCR

Remarks of the UNHCR Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Ms. Hai Kyung Jun

14 March 2024, Geneva

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a privilege to address you – the Standing Committee of UNHCR – for the first time.

You make our work possible – as refugee hosts, donors, partners – and we are very grateful.

I am honored to serve in the Asia and Pacific region, where I have spent a significant amount of time working and learning about the needs of displaced people.

I arrive at a challenging time – with more than seven million refugees in the region.

The highest number since records began.

Displaced people from both Afghanistan and Myanmar remain in dire need.

And I recently returned from Afghanistan, where I heard from Afghans about the devastating impacts of edicts – particularly on women and girls.

In all my discussions with the de facto authorities, I highlighted these impacts – and the need for change.

In Kandahar, I met with families who had recently returned from neighboring Pakistan — more than half a million since the end of 2023.

Many returnees told me that this was the first time in their home country.

They said they now needed support to reintegrate – opportunities for work, education, resources, a place to live.

UNHCR will continue to support returnees – both refugees and IDPS – and improve conditions in their areas of return.

Distinguished delegates,

Millions of Afghan refugees remain in neighboring countries – largely the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan.

Few countries in the world have generously hosted so many refugees – and for so long.

In support of these countries, we have developed the Regional Refugee Response Plan for 2024-2025.

We seek to assist 7.3 million Afghans and host communities, together with more than 50 partners.

I count on your strong support – as you plan on how to allocate resources for the coming year.

Chair,

We remain committed to the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. And hope this year to have another SSAR meeting, together with Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

I thank the Core Group of the SSAR for helping garner resources and support for the situation – notably the State of Qatar as Chair, and Netherlands as Vice-Chair.

Excellencies,

Turning to the situation in Myanmar, which has worsened in recent months.

Increases in violence and conflict means there are now nearly three million IDPs in the country.

Some people have also tried to move across borders.

And UNHCR calls on countries neighboring Myanmar to provide safety and refuge to those in need.

Given the situation in Myanmar, it is critical we sustain support to countries hosting refugees.

This includes India, Indonesia [which has seen a recent spike in arrivals by dangerous sea movements], Malaysia, Thailand, and the largest single host – Bangladesh.

I was pleased we could yesterday launch the 2024 Response Plan for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, together with senior officials from the Bangladeshi Government.

UNHCR and partners require 852 million dollars for nearly one million refugees, as well as their generous host communities.

We count on your continued support, which has been steadfast and deeply appreciated since the major influx in 2017.

Distinguished delegates,

We appreciate the generosity of our donors for the region, particularly with the high numbers of emergencies ongoing around the world.

And we are working further in the region on cost-saving measures and rationalization.

But it would be remiss of me not to highlight some examples funding shortfalls are already having on refugees:

In Malaysia, shortfalls have resulted in the reduction of support to our partners by more than half. This means key services for refugees are being lost – cash for the

most vulnerable, protection, education, and health support.

In Bangladesh, there have been several cuts already in the camps. Most notably, food assistance fell from 12 to 8 dollars last year [though increased again to 10 dollars recently]. This immediately raised malnutrition rates.

Excellencies,

Statelessness remains a major issue in our region.

Progress has been made. But 2.5 million stateless people still reside in Asia.

I recently attended the World Statelessness Conference in Malaysia — the largest ever convening on the subject.

And I reaffirmed UNHCR's commitment to the issue.

As the #IBelong campaign draws to an end, we hope the launch of the Global Alliance on Statelessness later this year will provide a platform for action.

Chair,

At the end of last year, we hosted the second Global Refugee Forum here in Geneva.

More than 160 commitments were made for and from the Asia region, including major pledges for the Afghanistan and Myanmar situations.

2024 presents an opportunity to shift from commitment to impact, building on the compassion and goodwill evoked at the GRF – and that we see exists every day in our region.

Chair,

Before I close, please allow me to thank my colleagues in the field for their commitment and dedication to serving displaced people.

I would like to especially highlight the work of our national colleagues in Myanmar and our dedicated female colleagues and partners in Afghanistan, who I was honored to mark International Women's Day with this year.

Thank you.

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