

**Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme (89th meeting)
Remarks by Raouf Mazou,
Assistant High Commissioner for Operations
Geneva, 13 March 2024**

Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Since we met last year on 7 March 2023 during the Standing Committee's 86th meeting, we have witnessed an 14% increase in global displacement. At the end of 2023, the number of forcibly displaced stood at 114 million. Last year, we declared 43 emergencies in 29 countries, representing a notable increase in comparison to the 35 declared in 2022.

Among the many conflicts which erupted since we last met, is the war in the Sudan which – despite resulting in one of the worst displacement crises globally – is unfortunately, receiving limited attention. To date, more than 1,6 million refugees have fled the country while some 200,000 refugees have moved to safer parts. 460,000 South Sudanese nationals have returned to their country and over 6 million persons have been internally displaced by this most recent crisis.

Over the past 11 months refugees and returnees have been arriving in the most remote – and sometimes inaccessible - areas of Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan. During

visits to a number of these countries throughout the year, I was able to not only witness first-hand the immense needs but also the outstanding generosity of countries and most specifically communities hosting refugees, despite challenges of their own.

Efforts in providing lifesaving support such as food, shelter, water, and health, in partnership with sister agencies including WFP, UNICEF and FAO remain of paramount importance.

Yet, we continue to experience funding shortfalls, including for the Sudan crisis, which have a devastating impact on the lives of the people we serve. As elaborated by Kelly, we find ourselves in a very preoccupying financial situation, the effects of which can be felt globally. Countries such as Bangladesh, Columbia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Lebanon, Uganda and Yemen have been particularly affected. In Colombia, for instance, UNHCR had to reduce its cash programme in 2023, and only prioritize specific protection cases, reaching only 20% of eligible families.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

The arrival of refugees – in large numbers - has and will undoubtedly continue to have a severe impact on the regions receiving them. It is incumbent upon the international community to continue to mobilize both the humanitarian resources necessary and simultaneously - and not sequentially – development assistance. Your support will allow us to continue gradually transform our programmes and activities - when circumstances allow - from being totally aid dependent to being more sustainable.

With the right strategy and investments, the presence of refugees can benefit hosting regions. As you will hear from Sajjad Malik, the Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions, we have in 2023,

launched a Strategy of engagement with development actors, articulating the instrumental role played by bilateral and multilateral development actors in the progress towards solutions for refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless people.

At operational level, we continue to see that bilateral actors are increasingly including forcibly displaced and stateless in their development programming. Some, including the EU, France, Germany and the Netherlands, have set up financial instruments or programmes targeting forced displacement or set targets in their development funding. Others such as Belgium, Denmark and Japan are leading by example in expanding their programmes to people we work with and supporting innovative approaches.

The World Bank has thus far invested 4.2 billion USD under the IDA window dedicated to refugees and host communities in 17 refugee-hosting countries. This investment is tied to 12.9 billion USD made available to refugee-hosting countries through 93 projects. So far, the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) has also provided more than 850 million USD worth of grants to provide concessional loans, unlocking a total commitment of 6.5 billion USD to six middle-income countries. The GCFF has in recent times however experienced difficulties in financing. We therefore appeal for continuous support in order to sustain the implementation of progressive refugee policies in host countries.

We continue to see a promising evolution in our collaboration with other Multilateral Development Banks such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). They have a strong comparative advantage in addressing the development needs of forcibly displaced, returnee and hosting communities including through investments in infrastructure,

agriculture, and livelihoods, and leveraging private sector engagement in these contexts.

This time last year, I announced the establishment of a Joint Initiative between UNHCR and the International Finance Corporation, the private sector arm of the World Bank Group. This initiative seeks to support the design of innovative and scalable private-sector solutions-oriented projects that will be implemented in forced displacement contexts. The team based in Istanbul, Türkiye has been gradually expanding its activities. It is supporting UNHCR and IFC teams all over the world. For instance, operations in Brazil, Ecuador, Moldova, Poland and Romania were supported with the production and the dissemination of Financial Inclusion Gap Assessments. A side event entitled *Making the Business Case for Refugee Hosting Areas: how is the private sector engaging in forced displacement contexts?* is being organized on Thursday morning at 8.45 and will provide an opportunity to hear some tangible examples on the progress being made.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

While most refugees seek asylum in countries neighbouring theirs, challenges posed by those who choose to move away from their regions as part of mixed movements for various reasons, should not be understated.

In various parts of the world including the Sahel, South America and Asia, tens of thousands of people embark on dangerous journeys. In 2023 alone, more than half a million people crossed the Darien Gap, while the numbers making the risky sea journey across the Mediterranean was at a six-year high. With an estimated 4,500 attempted journeys in 2023, the onward maritime movements of refugees in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal continued to increase, marking a 483 % upsurge from 2021 to 2023, mainly from Myanmar and Bangladesh.

To address the scale and complexity of the challenge of mixed movements of refugees and migrants, we are working constructively with states and other stakeholders to devise the best responses. Our recently revitalised collaboration with the authorities in Libya is an example of this. Our response must be collective, humane and in line with international legal obligations. This means adopting a 'route-based approach', which can address mobility-related challenges holistically, at all relevant points along key mixed movement routes – from countries of origin to destination including transit.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

There is an increasing understanding of the role climate change and natural hazards play in relation to forced displacement. This was evident at the Africa Climate Summit and at COP28. To better anticipate the effects of climate change, we are engaging with global thought leaders on predictive analytics and strategic foresight. Recently we have teamed up with the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) to help inform our policies and programmes. This is also contributing to our collective modelling of climate hotspots, including the development of Africa's first Climate Adaptation Strategy for the IGAD region.

Our Strategic Plan for Climate Action for the period 2024 – 2030, will be officially launched tomorrow during a dedicated side event. It sets out a comprehensive vision for UNHCR's engagement in wider efforts to ensure that forcibly displaced populations fleeing from climate-fuelled crises or living in climate-vulnerable countries find solutions, are protected from and resilient to the impacts of climate change and are living self-sufficient lives. We are also continuing our efforts to reduce our environmental footprint – as part of system-wide efforts

on “Greening the Blue”- by continuing to seek sustainable reductions across our management of buildings, facilities, fleet and air travel.

Needless to say, the climate crisis adds an additional dimension to existing challenges and we are seeking to access resources - which are new & additional - in order to provide better protection to people displaced worldwide.

Chair, Distinguished delegates,

57% of the forcibly displaced have remained in their country. The Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement has given us a renewed call to action to collaborate, strengthen partnerships and reorient our programming towards a common goal for lasting solutions. Through greater collaboration with actors across the UN system and beyond, and most importantly by working hand in hand with national and local authorities, we are contributing to creating conditions for safe and lasting solutions.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

Before concluding my statement, I would like to express appreciation to all partners: non-governmental Organizations, refugee-led organizations, United Nations sister agencies, private sector, civil society for the exceptional solidarity demonstrated during the second Global Refugee Forum in December last year. The event truly embodied the spirit and intentions of the Global Compact on Refugees and was truly a moment of unity. At a time of unprecedented needs and given the complex state of current affairs, partnership, responsibility-sharing and solidarity have never been more important. To this end, we look forward to working closely with you all to ensure the implementations of the very significant pledges made. I would also

want to express great appreciation to member states for the financial support you are providing to the people we serve.

Finally, allow me to commend the work of thousands of our colleagues all over the world - some of whom serving in the most difficult contexts – as we will hear from Shoko Shimozawa, Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply. Their dedication is what makes UNHCR.

Thank you for your continued and unwavering support.