

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Seventy-Fifth Session – Australia's National Statement

Check against delivery

High Commissioner, Chair, your excellencies, distinguished delegates. Australia would like to align itself with the MIKTA statement as delivered by Mexico.

Australia acknowledges the tireless efforts of UNHCR staff, and the risks they face working in dangerous environments. We offer our sincere condolences for the UNHCR staff recently killed in Lebanon.

2023 was the deadliest year on record for humanitarian workers, and 2024 is on track to be worse. International humanitarian law is being undermined with severe consequences for current and future conflicts. Calls for compliance must be heard.

As announced by our Foreign Minister, Australia convened a group of Ministers to pursue a new Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel. It will drive action to increase safety and security for the courageous personnel working to assist and protect civilians.

Australia's support for UNHCR remains steadfast as it works to realign in the face of extraordinary protection needs and resource constraints. We are increasing the flexibility of our funding, and encourage others to do the same. In addition to our predictable core funding, we have delivered on our Global Refugee Forum pledges to support UNHCR's Sudan and Afghanistan responses, and the Rohingya crisis. This recognises our shared responsibility for refugee protection.

Australia also pledged its global leadership in expanding access to resettlement and complementary pathway opportunities. We are exploring a 'train to hire' model in the Asia-Pacific, to provide refugees with skills sought after in the global market, and to support third country solutions.

We are committed to increasing refugees' economic inclusion and access to third country solutions, through our role as Chair of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility. This includes expanding our Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, to deliver up to 500 primary visas by June 2025.

We congratulate UNHCR on the launch of Global Alliance to End Statelessness. We are pleased to have joined and look forward to collaborating on sustainable solutions to statelessness.

Australia commends UNHCR's commitment to diversity and inclusion. This is fundamental to the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, and to UNHCR's vital protection mandate. Protection is for all those who need it. We support UNHCR's efforts to reaffirm the

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rights and protection of LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced and stateless people as one of its global priorities.

Chair, as Second Vice Chair of the Office of the Executive Committee Bureau this year, I have sought to demonstrate Australia's commitment to transparency, consultation and inclusivity in our representation of the Asia Pacific Group. It has been a privilege.

I am honoured now to introduce Ms Apajok Biar, a member of Australia's Refugee Advisory Panel.

Thank you, Ambassador.

At the first GRF in 2019, the Australian Government pledged to advance meaningful refugee participation. As the first refugee advisor to attend ExCom with the Australian delegation, I am glad to embody that commitment.

But meaningful refugee participation doesn't only happen in high level meetings. As we all seek durable solutions, it is critical that refugees are involved in all decision-making mechanisms, and discussions in policies and programming.

Because we know from our lived experience that refugee crises do not impact everyone in the same way. We know women, children and other marginalised groups like people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+, are increasingly impacted by the tragedies of war, displacement, and sexual and gender-based violence, like in the current Sudan, Ukraine and Gaza crises.

We hear the importance of addressing age, gender and diversity in our protection responses, to ensure no one is left behind. What does this look like in practice? Initiatives like the Australian Government's 'women at risk visa', of which 32,200 have been granted since 1989 to enable women and children in vulnerable situations to safely resettle in Australia.

Understanding that gender equality can be achieved through women's empowerment, the Australian Government will continue to support refugee women-led initiatives in our region, as co-lead of the 2023 GRF pledge on Gender Equality and Protection from Gender-Based Violence.

I acknowledge and thank UNHCR for their ongoing efforts to support refugee-led organisations, but there is more we can all do to consider how refugees, and particularly women, can be centred in policy and programming.

In this time of unprecedented need and constrained resources, I urge UNHCR and all Member States to ask themselves: Are you looking for ways to increase funding to refugee-led organisations? Are the mechanisms you are creating to facilitate refugee participation inclusive? Are you acknowledging refugee partners and advisors for their expertise and as collaborators? Because the most efficient and effective outcomes will be achieved by working with refugee experts.

Thank you.