

Statement by

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before

the 75th Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ExCom),

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Chairperson,

His Excellency, High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations,

Honorable Ministers,

It is my pleasure to address the Seventy-Fifth Session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR.

At the outset, I would like to draw attention to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza Lebanon and Syria as well as the brutal genocide of civilians, by the occupying Zionist regime and the mass displacement of millions. It is essential that these genocidal actions as well as the bombardment of hospitals and refugee camps, be unequivocally condemned by the international community.

We pay our tribute to all victims of the attacks carried out against UN humanitarian staff, particularly UNRWA, by the occupying regime. The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns all of these atrocities.

Chairperson,

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting a significant number of Afghan refugees and displaced persons for many years which posed numerous challenges in this regard; this includes among others, the financial burden, overpopulation, pressure on infrastructure, reduced resilience of the host communities, security concerns, health care challenges, educational burden, social tensions, and negative environmental impacts. According to the statistics released by the International Organization for Migration, the Mass Influx of Afghans into Iran

still continues, with over one million Afghans settling in the country in the first half of the year 2024. While, the mass influx is still ongoing, the UNHCR declared the end of the Emergency Response in Afghanistan in 2022 and international support has significantly decreased. This places the heaviest burden of responsibility on the Iranian government. This situation indicates the continuation of challenges faced by my country. We urge for a re-recognition of the emergency situation prior to 2022 while re-emphasizing an understanding of the severe economic and infrastructural pressures faced by my country, which requires timely action to allocate further adequate resources.

Annually, billions of dollars are spent on providing shelter, food, healthcare, and education to foreign nationals in the country. Despite the scarcity of national resources and unjust unilateral sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran has, with a humanitarian and Islamic approach hosted these refugees above and beyond its obligations. We have provided educational and healthcare services to refugees and displaced persons without discrimination. The continuation of education for Afghan students, free primary healthcare services, free health insurance coverage for vulnerable refugees and benefiting from subsidies are only some aspects of my country's humanitarian approach towards refugees and foreign displaced persons. These are beyond our four reservations to the 1951 convention. All these supports are being provided, despite the fact that the vast majority having an illegal presence in the country.

All Afghan students, regardless of their refugee status, have the opportunity to enroll in public schools. Taking into account the lack of sufficient educational space for national students, it is absolutely necessary to build new schools in order to accommodate Afghan students to join their Iranian fellow. Continued provision of virtual educational systems can be maintained, if adequate financial support is provided by the international community as in the absence of its serious attention this will not be feasible.

Chairperson,

Temporary solutions cannot sustainably resolve the issue of refugees. It is upon the UNHCR and the international community to make greater efforts to facilitate and expedite the return of refugees and displaced persons to their countries of origin. In the annual final declaration on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan is prioritized, and Iran urges for the return of refugees to be taken seriously.

The failure of the international community to facilitate return and their negligence towards rebuilding infrastructures in that country is unacceptable. It now seems that for a while, the UNHCR's initiative to create Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) support groups in full coordination with the Q4 mechanism has fallen out of focus, overshadowing the prioritization of Afghanistan. Therefore, considering the capacity of this initiative and the appropriate solutions in addressing the existing challenges, the continuation of follow-ups and meetings should be emphasized.

The allocation of financial resources in the field of refugees and displaced persons is seriously disappointing for Iran compared to other countries in the region. It is noteworthy that less than half a percent of the total costs of hosting is funded by international resources with current allocations mainly aimed at Local Integration.

UNHCR's 2023 operational budget in Iran has been cut by 70% to 32.8 million dollars compared to 2022 and has been further reduced, indicating the need for a more active approach on the part of the UNHCR and the international community. The emergence of new crises worldwide should not lead to the sidelining of the prolonged and chronic crisis of Afghanistan.

It should also be noted that our hosting of displaced persons occurs under the harshest, inhumane and illegal sanctions and unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) imposed by the United States. These illegal sanctions pressure the activities of relevant organizations, preventing them from fulfilling their humanitarian responsibilities toward those in need in sanctioned countries.

As emphasized by the High Commissioner time and again, the burden and responsibility for refugees must be shared across the international community. Reasonably, it is unjust and impractical for a single country to bear the cost and responsibility of hosting the massive numbers of displaced persons. This important principle has been overlooked in relation to my country as we are feeling increasing pressure on our limited public resources. **This situation cannot continue.**

Thank you for your attention.