



**- Achtung Sperrfrist: Redebeginn 17.12.2019, ca. 10:45 Uhr  
MEZ-**

## **Speech by the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas**

at the opening of the Global Refugee Forum  
Geneva, 17 December 2019

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Secretary-General,  
Ignazio Cassis,  
Esteemed heads of state and government,  
Ministers and members of parliament,  
Excellencies,  
Filippo,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Filippo, you visited Berlin on World Refugee Day this year. At the Freie Universität, you held discussions with students on two questions:

Is there a global refugee crisis?

Or is global solidarity in crisis?

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here today to seek answers to both of these questions.

The first answer is no! There is no refugee crisis.

The number of refugees around the world is, in reality, only the symptom of a very different crisis, namely a far-reaching crisis in international cooperation.

More and more people are becoming refugees

- because we, the international community, haven't managed to find any solutions to protracted crises and conflicts such as in Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.
- because we, before our very eyes, have accepted that climate change will lay waste ever more often to entire countries and regions and displace increasing numbers of people in the future.
- and because we haven't managed to support refugees and the countries hosting them in such a way that, at the very least, the majority of them enjoy prospects there.

This brings me to my second question, which pertains to solidarity.

The answer to this is yes, we are facing a crisis of international solidarity.

- The poorest are currently shouldering the heaviest burden. Nine of the ten biggest host countries are those with low or medium incomes. The only industrialised country in this group is Germany.

- Only 20 percent of the world's 193 countries are involved in helping the over 70 million displaced persons globally in any appreciable way. This is in spite of the fact that the Geneva Convention applies to us all.

Such impersonal numbers in the millions are often abused, also here in Germany. They can be abused to stoke fear and hatred and to fuel smear campaigns.

That is why one thing is particularly important to me, which is that we remember one thing in all that we do and all the decisions that we make. All of these numbers are about people and their stories.

“Statistics are human beings with the tears wiped away”, is how one saying succinctly puts this.

The message that we must send from this global meeting is this:

We want greater solidarity in the approach to refugees,  
greater international cooperation with the host countries,  
more multilateralism!

Over 400 delegations – governments, NGOs and refugee representatives – have come here today. This sends a strong signal, a signal that makes me confident that we won't make do with appeals here in Geneva.

So let's focus on what we must change, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, we must share the load among more and broader shoulders.

And, secondly, we must offer refugees prospects for living self-determined lives. Lives in dignity.

Germany will continue to support both of these objectives, in its double role as the second-biggest donor and as the fifth-largest host country for refugees.

In recent years, we have seen how it is not easy, even for a country of our size and economic strength, to take in and integrate hundreds of thousands of refugees.

How much more difficult must this be for countries with fewer resources? Countries such as Pakistan, Ethiopia, Costa Rica and Turkey, which are sharing this podium with us today?

The host countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America deserve our greatest respect and recognition. But that's not enough. They also need our active support.

- This is why the European Union is helping Turkey, which has taken in more refugees than any other country, to look after and integrate these people to the tune of six billion euros.
- This is why we're supporting the proposal to establish new regional support platforms, to improve the situation of Afghan refugees, for example.
- Resettlement is often the last resort for many refugees who have no prospect of returning to their countries of origin but who also cannot remain in their countries of first admission. Only 25 countries are prepared to do this at the current time, however.

Germany will increase its number of resettlement places to 5500 next year. This is a trend that we want to keep up in the future.

- And it goes without saying that the United Nations, the host countries and the many people working to help protect refugees can continue to count on our financial support.

Germany has quadrupled its humanitarian assistance in the past six years, to 1.6 billion euros this year.

And the UNHCR, Filippo, is and remains one of our largest and most important partners in this endeavour. This year, we have more than doubled our unremarked contributions to your work. And I am pleased to be able to announce that in 2020 we will maintain our support at a level similar to that of 2019, with a first tranche of 124 million euros that I can fully confirm today.

- Another way that we are working to mitigate the root causes of migration and better integrate refugees is through our development cooperation efforts. This year, we have spent 1.3 billion euros for this purpose, and we have reached far more than 10 million people.

And we will maintain these efforts to dovetail humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding even better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our second message today is: Let us improve refugees' prospects for the future.

To do so, we need to change how we look at refugees!

In international cooperation, we talk constantly about resilience and how we can strengthen it.

Why don't we then also make a targeted effort to improve the prospects of those who have already demonstrated how incredibly resilient they are? People who know what it means to lose everything and to start from scratch?

Host countries benefit from this in particular. The extent to which that's true, I realised again just this morning when I was speaking with some young refugees who live in Germany.

One of them is Muhammad Shikhani. He had to flee the war in Syria in 2013.

He studied civil engineering in Damascus. In Lebanon, however, with one million Syrian refugees, he worked odd jobs at best and also lived in constant fear of needing to return to Syria. Five years ago, Muhammad applied for a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarship that enables refugees like himself to pursue their studies in Germany. Today, he is working on his doctorate and doing research on the effects of climate change on water. In addition, he helps other refugees find their way in Germany's higher education landscape.

I believe such an attitude of solidarity, like that of Muhammad, enriches every country.

When I asked him where he found the strength to keep going, Muhammad replied: "education was my CPR."

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is something we should take to heart. You, Filippo, put this in a nutshell last summer in Berlin, when you spoke of a "refugee education crisis".

I am therefore pleased that today I can make a comprehensive pledge, on behalf of the German Government, towards this key aim of the Global Compact on Refugees:

- next year, we will make available more than 13 million euros for an initiative that is named after one of the most famous German refugees of all time, namely Albert Einstein. This year alone, the initiative has awarded 8,200 fellowships to refugees in 54 countries.

And I am very happy, honourable colleague Prehn, that Denmark has decided to partner with us on this programme, so that together with UNHCR we can make it a multilateral effort.

- Moreover, we will provide more than 10 million euros to the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which supports persecuted scientists.
- In 2019 alone, we have made available 300 million euros to our employment initiative in the Middle East, and today we can confirm that this support will be continued.
- Still this year, we will increase by 16 million euros our pledge for Education Cannot Wait, a programme that gives educational opportunities to children and youths in regions affected by conflict.
- In Germany, too, we will continue to promote integration of refugees into universities, with more than 27 million euros annually.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fact that people flee from war, hunger, natural disasters or persecution is as old as humanity itself. And it will not go away.

However, by acting in concert, we can manage to better deal with the effects of displacement. Our meeting today is an important step in this regard.

If we find ourselves in need of motivation as we move forward, let us look at those whom this is all about: People like Muhammad, the doctoral student from Damascus.

If we strengthen these people's potential, then what on the surface may appear to be a refugee crisis will become a refugee opportunity.

Thank you very much.

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