



**Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN
Geneva**

Statement

72nd Session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR

**Statement by Mr. Sahibzada Muhammad Mahboob Sultan,
Minister for States & Frontier Regions (SAFRON)
(04 October, 2021)**

**Honourable Chairperson,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman**

During last year, the number of refugees and displaced persons continued to surge to another record level. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to add to the existing challenges of responding to the needs of people seeking refuge from war, conflict, persecution and climate change.

The prevailing complex and multifold challenges demand more robust and collective efforts to meet the growing protection needs and to forge durable solutions.

We commend the UNHCR leadership and the staff for their dedication in discharging their responsibilities under challenging circumstances.

Chairperson,

After four decades of instability and conflict, Afghanistan today stands at another cross road. Even as apprehensions persist about deterioration in humanitarian situation inside Afghanistan, there is also a chance to avert yet another crisis through our enhanced engagement aimed at stabilization of the country.

Pakistan welcomes the efforts of the United Nations, UNHCR and the international community in galvanizing much needed humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. The generous commitments made during the High-Level Ministerial Meeting held last month are indeed commendable.

With 3.6 million internally displaced persons in Afghanistan and more than 5 million displaced Afghans in the neighbouring countries, there looms another wave of refugees in the region and beyond. Timely humanitarian assistance, reinforced by economic support and stabilization can help avert the vicious cycle of instability, displacement and exodus of refugees.

Engagement and outreach is critical. The international community should demonstrate support and solidarity with the Afghan people at this juncture.

Addressing the immediate humanitarian situation inside Afghanistan should remain a key priority. At the same time, the millions of Afghan people being hosted by neighbouring countries need equal attention and assistance. The international community must also shoulder responsibility and burden by expanding assistance to refugee hosting countries.

Chairperson,

On its part, Pakistan has supported the humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan in many ways, facilitating the evacuations, establishing humanitarian corridors through air and land routes, and providing of food, medicines and other supplies.

This assistance is in addition to hosting millions of Afghan refugees over four decades.

We will continue to support UNHCR and other UN agencies in their relief efforts by providing logistical and other support through Pakistan.

Chairperson,

There are lessons to be learnt from past experiences. Managing the humanitarian situation alone is not sufficient. A pragmatic approach, anchored in pursuit of durable solutions and prevention is more than ever necessary. The most preferred and best solution remains voluntary repatriation in a safe, dignified and well-resourced manner.

It is equally important to create conducive conditions for voluntary returns such as; an environment free of violence, political, social and economic stabilization in the troubled regions. Sustained engagement with Afghanistan is, therefore, indispensable to create these conditions.

Chairperson,

COVID-19 has strained resources. Despite economic and public health challenges of our own, the refugees in Pakistan have benefitted from our inclusive policies of vaccinations, education, health and livelihoods.

Vaccine equity remains a moral and humanitarian imperative. This includes refugees and host countries.

New development financing tools should be evolved to mitigate the financial burden on refugee host countries. These funding arrangements should stay clear of adding additional debt burden of refugee hosting countries.

Chairperson,

Notwithstanding the serious socio-economic pressures generated by the COVID pandemic, Pakistan has demonstrated unparalleled generosity and hospitality while adhering to the highest standards of protection and facilitation.

Afghan refugees continue to have access to public health facilities, education and livelihood opportunities. On the lines of social protection programme, Ehsaas for vulnerable Pakistani families, we have worked with UNHCR to provide cash assistance of Rs. 12000 per family to extremely vulnerable refugee families. In addition, food assistance has also been provided to thousands of needy refugee families.

The ongoing validation exercise for refugees, commonly known as the DRIVE Project will biometrically register around 1.5 million refugees during this year. The enriched and updated information will help in their better management and would also benefit the country of origin in their resettlement and reintegration on their dignified return.

Chairperson,

With an eye towards stabilization of Afghanistan, we look forward to a time bound, well resourced and mutually agreed roadmap for repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

We thank the High Commissioner and UNHCR for their continued support.

Pakistan remains committed to provide every assistance to Afghan refugee in the country and looks forward to engaging with the international community including through the Support Platform for Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR).

I thank you
