

Hina Jilani – Elders’ Statement at the HLOM, 15 December 2021

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address the first High-Level Officials Meeting, three years after the Global Compact on Refugees was agreed.

I am speaking to you today as a member of The Elders, the organisation of international global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela who work for peace, justice and human rights.

As you consider your recommendations for the future, I want to reflect on some of the trends we have seen since 2018, when member states agreed the Compact and committed to an equitable responsibility-sharing framework.

The vast majority of refugees - 86% - continue to be hosted by developing countries and we have seen positive examples of their solidarity and leadership. Many countries have offered resettlement and protection to Afghan refugees following the recent crisis, and I encourage governments to open up all possible pathways to protect them. But let us not forget that there are many who are still waiting to be assisted, and to be saved from imminent harm and threat.

More can be done at the regional level to share responsibility. For example, ASEAN member states can do more to work with the Bangladesh government and provide resettlement and complementary pathways for desperate Rohingya refugees within the region.

But there is real and worsening global inequity when it comes to responsibility-sharing. The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis are exacerbating global injustices, and refugees are acutely vulnerable to the failure of the multilateral system to uphold international standards of rights and protection.

Donor countries must increase the level of development assistance provided to host countries, without linking this to donor countries’ own migration objectives.

And we need to see ambitious, global pledges to provide homes for the 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement worldwide, with the US and EU taking leading roles. Last year, just 1% of refugees found a durable solution. The global resettlement targets that we agreed three years ago have not been met, even though they fall far short of the overall need.

There must also be a recommitment to preserve the integrity of the global asylum system, which remains the cornerstone of refugee protection. The response in many of the wealthy countries of the global North in recent years has been to shift rather than share responsibility. Externalisation policies, such as those pursued by Australia, and now Denmark and the UK, directly undermine the core principle of global responsibility-sharing. Pushbacks of asylum-seekers at sea and the criminalisation of rescue efforts, as we have seen in some European coastal states, violate the Refugee Convention.

Looking ahead, it is vital that refugees have a voice in the decisions and policies that affect their lives. The Elders welcome UNHCR's recent efforts to consult and include refugees. More financial and technical support for refugee-led organisations would enable them to have real policy influence.

Our approach to refugees must always be guided by our common humanity, and by the dignity and safety of every human being. The global protection system depends on *all* governments fulfilling their obligations.

Thank you.