

UK intervention at the UNHCR Executive Committee 2019

The UK aligns itself with the statement made by the EU on behalf of its Member States.

First, we would like to recognise the tireless work of UNHCR staff as they meet need and offer protection in challenging, dangerous situations around the world. In this, the UK remains a staunch friend of UNHCR, with the impact of our funding amplified through our political support, with developmental support that helps to deliver longer term solutions for refugees, and as an important resettlement partner.

As those here today will be only too aware, another year has seen yet another rise in forcible displacement – for the first time now exceeding 70 million people. So it is more important than ever to recognise and pay tribute to the huge generosity of host nations and communities in opening their borders and homes to those forced to flee conflict and persecution.

While fully recognising the challenges of hosting large numbers of refugees, at the same time we recall that involuntary or forced returns are a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. We urge host countries to ensure that any repatriation is conducted in safety and dignity and that refugees can decide for themselves whether the situation is right or not for them to return. Donors must step up with funding to make long-term support feasible.

For our part, the UK is firmly committed to supporting refugees and their hosts. In the last few months alone, we have committed up to £30 million to vulnerable Venezuelans and £87 million of life-saving aid for the Rohingya crisis, and of course we continue to maintain significant levels of multiyear and un-earmarked funding to UNHCR.

Alongside this we recognise the growing challenge of Statelessness on which the UNHCR has a long running campaign. Statelessness is a political, development and a humanitarian challenge. It can rob people of their basic dignity and human rights. As a result of it, millions are unable to access education, healthcare, jobs, freedom of movement or financial services. Stateless can lead to or exacerbate conditions of poverty, posing a challenge to the humanitarian and development system. The UK supports UNHCR's #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024 and we work with international organisations and UNHCR to find long term durable solutions to statelessness.

The UK's new global resettlement scheme, announced earlier this year, reinforces that position with a commitment to resettle in the region of 5,000 of the world's most vulnerable refugees in its first year.

Looking forward, there are four priority areas I would like to highlight:

Firstly, the critical matter of reform. We strongly welcome UNHCR's commitment to a consistent, organisation-wide approach to reform and remain very supportive of the decentralisation process, with strong country operations that work in partnership with others. UNHCR's ability to collaborate with new actors, particularly development actors, is key and it will need the right people with the right skills to deliver that.

UNHCR must also continue to work as one organisation with coherent priorities, controls and transparent decision-making to avoid fragmentation. We hope for regular updates on the progress, challenges and risks involved.

Achieving reform of the UN development system as a whole remains of considerable priority to the UK and UNHCR has an important role to play here. We commend the High Commissioner's and UNHCR's efforts to date, including its leadership on the BIG initiative, but momentum must be maintained. We look forward to learning more about the steps that UNHCR is taking to support effective overall UN reform, including stronger UN co-ordination and collaboration on the ground.

Secondly, risk management and transparency remain of critical importance, so we are pleased to see UNHCR's continued roll-out of risk management 2.0 and the increase in the number of risk management positions: ensuring decentralisation continues to strengthen risk management at country level. We particularly welcome the planned prioritisation of high-risk environments here.

It is also good to see better reporting of sexual misconduct, a reassuring signal that the systems that have been put in place are working. It is essential that UNHCR continues to take action on specific cases in the short term and works to reduce numbers in the longer term by tackling this toxic issue at root.

Thirdly, the UK remains deeply concerned at the scale and severity of internal displacement and we are clear on the importance of pushing forward efforts to address this challenge.

The response to internal displacement is political and developmental in nature as much as it is humanitarian, and to that end we welcome UNHCR's new policy on engagement in situations of Internal Displacement and look forward to its coherent implementation alongside key partners and Governments.

We also welcome the new UN High level panel on Internally Displaced People (IDPs). This offers the best opportunity to accelerate progress. We hope that the panel will be led by countries most affected by internal displacement and composed of a good balance of those with significant expertise and insight; those with political influence; and those who can offer fresh perspectives. These panellists will have an important job to do in forming the best feasible recommendations to improve responses.

Finally, December will see the inaugural Global Refugee Forum here in Geneva, which the UK fully supports. The Forum will provide an important platform to maintain and build on the momentum generated by the Global Compact on

Refugees.

We must remember that a key aim of the Compact is to ensure better and more equitable responsibility sharing. The Forum is a real opportunity to bring in non-traditional donors and resettlement countries and to broaden the support base. We urge all states to actively engage.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the Forum is not an end in itself, but a stepping stone in implementation of the Compact. As well as delivering on the day, it will be critical to identify priorities, opportunities and decision points for the year ahead and beyond to ensure a common understanding and direction of travel and delivery of tangible outcomes for host countries, host communities and refugees.

The UK looks forward to playing its part in this process.