

*As delivered*

**Closing Remarks by Mr. António Guterres,  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

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Of the High Commissioner's Programme**

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Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This has been an excellent ExCom meeting, and I am indebted to you for your frank and constructive participation. I am not going to make a lengthy speech, or to repeat the commitments which I laid out for you in my opening remarks. These are already clear. But inspired by our discussions, I would like to reinforce some key elements which I hope will underpin our collective engagement in the coming year.

*First, solidarity and effective burden-sharing.*

We need to take good note of the concerns expressed by many host countries about the impact of a large refugee presence on their economies, on their social services, on security and on the environment. And we should not forget smaller countries which host huge refugee populations.

Burden-sharing needs to be visible and to have a meaning. Financial support is one important dimension. But true burden-sharing also means assuming a collective responsibility for mitigating the impact on host populations and developing and implementing solutions. It demands energy, political will, and new forms of cooperation.

A key aspect is effective solidarity with host communities, often themselves exposed to poverty, social exclusion and underdevelopment, and not necessarily high on the list of priorities for reconstruction and development programmes. It means restoring refugee-impacted areas and addressing environmental degradation. Here, the joint programmes recently developed for refugee affected and refugee-hosting areas in Pakistan, Tanzania and Bangladesh offer positive and instructive models, but they need to be strengthened and multiplied.

Burden-sharing and collective engagement must also be at the centre of efforts to secure durable solutions. UNHCR alone does not have the resources and the technical capacity to deliver the sustained political, social and economic support needed to ensure lasting solutions both in voluntary repatriation and in local integration.

Many of you have highlighted the important potential of the Delivering as One approach, and we are encouraged by our experience in the pilots, as well as in our engagement with

the Peacebuilding Commission. But we need a coherent and systematic approach going beyond the UN and host governments. The World Bank and other international financial institutions, bilateral development agencies, NGOs and the private sector all have a crucial role to play. In this respect, we look forward to the Kabul conference, which we hope will be a landmark in the expression of strong international solidarity and of an effective collaborative approach to the complex challenges of reintegration.

Solidarity and collective engagement is indeed the key to making progress in protracted refugee situations. I look forward to exploring this further with you at the next meeting of the Dialogue on Protection Challenges.

*Second: a more effective, rational and results-oriented humanitarian response.*

The humanitarian reform process is already proving its worth and we remain committed to making it work even better. We also believe that there are important synergies between our refugee operations and our expanded role in situations of internal displacement. Our engagement with the internally displaced in the framework of the cluster approach does not and will not undermine in any way the integrity of our mandate or affect the exercise of our obligations towards refugees under international law and the Statute of my office.

Many of you expressed support for our renewed focus on defining and protecting humanitarian space, and on reasserting core humanitarian principles. We are working closely with OCHA and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and in the coming year we hope to engage a range of governments, civil society and other relevant actors on this issue. Our work – and in particular, our solutions mandate - is clearly shaped by broader political dynamics, but we must ensure that it maintains its core humanitarian values.

We very much welcome the observation made by one delegation that UNHCR's structural and management change process should be judged through the prism of protection. UNHCR, as any other organisation, is not an end in itself. We only exist to protect and support the people we care for. That is why reform is necessary. But the reform process itself is also not an end. We must be judged by our effectiveness in responding to the protection needs of those for whom we work on the ground. The Global Needs Assessment and the other tools we have developed will enable a much more systematic prioritisation of those needs, and will help us to assess our progress towards results. Coupled with the commitment to improve our accountability to beneficiaries, we believe that this will transform the way in which we work and allow also for better professional fulfillment of our staff.

*Third: stronger and more systematic protection delivery*

Protection space is rooted in a culture of tolerance and solidarity. I very much welcome the interventions of those delegations who stressed the need to redouble our energy in tackling racism and xenophobia. In this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we must work together to understand and to address the roots of intolerance – poverty, inequality and insecurity.

We also need to strengthen our joint efforts to ensure refugee protection in the broader context of international migration. Our debates this week have highlighted that national migration policies can be coupled with protection sensitive border management and unimpeded access to asylum. Indeed, these objectives are mutually reinforcing.

The empowerment of women must also remain a central focus of our work in the coming year. This is a key component in achieving protection and solutions. Girls' education, access to livelihoods and economic empowerment create the conditions through which rights can be most effectively articulated and exercised.

I have mentioned on several recent occasions that we can expect to see new patterns of forced displacement in the years to come. I will not repeat those comments today. I do, however, want to ask how UNHCR's mandate can most effectively be exercised in urban contexts.

In 1800, only three per cent of the world's population lived in cities and towns. This year the proportion will reach 50 per cent, and in 2050 it may be as high as 70 per cent. UNHCR is obliged to adapt its way of working so as to meet the needs of refugees, returnees, internally displaced and stateless persons who were born or who have taken up residence in an urban area.

Traditional models of protection, assistance and solutions, based on the establishment of camps, will be less and less relevant. But what will take their place? In particular, we must ask ourselves: How can public institutions and civil society in urban areas develop the capacity required to provide services not only to their usual clients but also to displaced populations? And how can UNHCR improve the exercise of its mandate in urban contexts? In answering these questions, we must learn from each other, from refugees and from the communities where they live.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the impressive characteristics of this Excom meeting has been the extent to which we have focused on the issue of beneficiary rights and needs. There has been a clear consensus with respect to the idea that UNHCR's performance is best judged by its impact on the lives of the people it cares for.

But perhaps we can be a little more ambitious in our thinking. By supporting the world's displaced and stateless people, we can also make an important contribution to the attainment of broader objectives.

When we provide protection and solutions we facilitate the task of maintaining international peace and security.

When we provide protection and solutions we help to create the conditions for sustainable development.

When we provide protection and solutions we advance the cause of human rights and gender equality.

And when we provide protection and solutions we promote a context in which migration can be more effectively and equitably managed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have heard a lot this week about income, costs, expenditures and disbursements. But I would like you to leave Geneva with another word in your mind: 'investment'. The resources that you so generously provide to UNHCR certainly enable us to support better some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people. But they also represent an investment in the creation of a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Thank you very much.