

## **UK Statement- UNHCR Executive Committee September 2009**

Let me firstly thank the High Commissioner for his opening remarks yesterday, and the EU Presidency for their statement on behalf of the EU, with which we fully align ourselves.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to open by paying tribute to the important work that UNHCR continues to do around the world to bring humanitarian assistance to many of the world's most vulnerable people. In particular, I want to express our deep gratitude to UNHCR's staff who often operate in very difficult circumstances. We pay tribute to those UNHCR colleagues who have lost their lives in the course of their duty.

We are concerned at the increase in attacks on humanitarian actors over the last 12 months. We of course condemn such attacks in the strongest possible terms.

We have been equally dismayed at the proliferation of situations where access to civilian populations has been denied to humanitarian organisations. We call on all parties, to any conflict, to respect international humanitarian law and the concepts of humanitarian space and neutrality and to allow humanitarian workers timely and unimpeded access. We welcome the fact that this years ECOSOC resolution re-affirmed these important principles.

Mr Chairman,

We wish to thank the High Commissioner for the work that he and his team have done in driving forwards UNHCR's ambitious Structural and Management change process. We very much endorse the objectives of this reform.

We supported the roll-out of the Global Needs Assessment in 2009 and hope that it will enable UNHCR to present a more objective picture of humanitarian needs. The challenge now lies in prioritising those needs. We encourage UNHCR to put a sound and transparent process in place to ensure the effective, needs-based, allocation of resources across its four population pillars.

We also welcome the progress made to date to implement the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming initiative in UNHCRs work practices. However, we note that UNHCR is still falling short of its own targets in the area of gender equity. We encourage UNHCR to continue its efforts to reach all of the targets set out under the initiative.

Mr Chairman,

We are pleased that UNHCR formally reiterated its commitment to humanitarian reform at this month's Standing Committee. As a large operational Agency we believe it is right that UNHCR should be amongst the leaders of reform.

We are particularly pleased that UNHCR has reaffirmed the importance of its responsibilities under the cluster approach. We further encourage UNHCR to codify the centrality of these responsibilities within its organisational structure, with clear instructions to relevant Divisions, Bureaux and Country offices.

Mr Chairman,

We welcome UNHCR's engagement, in collaboration with OCHA, in efforts to strengthen the Humanitarian Coordinator system and we encourage UNHCR to fully support the authority of Humanitarian Co-ordinators at a country level.

Mr Chairman,

We believe that timely data on humanitarian needs is a fundamental pre-requisite for efficient resource allocations. While progress has been made on UNHCR's own needs assessment methods, the issue of Common Needs Assessments has been stalled for the past decade.

A more common approach to Needs Assessment would go a long way to enabling the humanitarian community to compare needs across sectors and regions and respond more coherently while minimising duplication of effort.

In this context, we urge UNHCR to cooperate closely with OCHA and others to address the issues surrounding needs assessment, and to step up efforts in the IASC Needs Assessment Task Force.

Mr Chairman,

We are concerned by the increase in the number of people internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence. The global population of concern to UNHCR now includes more internally displaced persons (IDPs) than refugees.

We believe that everything must be done to respond to the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons, and to find durable solutions to their plight. This is primarily the responsibility of affected states. However, UNHCR has a particular responsibility to lead and coordinate the international humanitarian response in the sectors of protection, emergency shelter and camp coordination and camp management. We continue to strongly support this role.

We encourage UNHCR to ensure that its systems – particularly its budget structure and resource allocation mechanisms – enable it to implement its responsibilities towards IDPs. In situations where both refugees and IDPs are present, prioritisation should be made according to need rather than legal status.

Mr Chairman,

We welcome efforts by UNHCR to increase the global base of resettlement and are pleased to note the recent successes in this area. We further commend UNHCR and the Government of Romania on the establishment of the Evacuation Transit Centre for refugees in Romania.

We welcome the European Commission's proposals on a joint, voluntary, EU resettlement programme, and support the role that UNHCR holds in advising the EU on resettlement priorities. [We share UNHCR's view that an EU wide programme could increase global resettlement spaces. ]

[We see resettlement as a key element in protecting the world's most vulnerable, but we believe it should sit alongside programmes to increase voluntary return and local integration. ]

We believe that there is an increasingly urgent need to focus on durable solutions for separated and asylum seeking adolescents and children in Europe. We encourage UNHCR to work with relevant stakeholders to update its guidelines on Formal Determination of the Best Interests of the Child for use in developed countries where their applicability in the context of established child welfare systems requires further clarification.

Finally Mr Chairman,

I want to take this opportunity to express the UK's appreciation to those countries which currently host large refugee populations. The UK will continue to support UNHCR in its efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of these people and to find durable solutions for them.