

**70th Session of the Executive Committee
of UNHCR**

**Statement by Mr. Shehryar Afridi,
Minister of State for States and Frontier Regions (SARFON)
(07 October, 2019)**

**Mr. Chairman, UN High Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished
Delegates,**

Let me start with a verse of philosopher poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal,
“There are thousands of God's lovers, who are roaming in the wilderness,
I shall adore the one who will be the lover of God's people”.

Delegates

The sole purpose of life is to serve humanity and giving love isn't a
luxury, taking care is necessity.

Excellencies

Awareness and efforts to address the Refugees situation is much more
today than it had ever been. Pakistan has significantly contributed to this
cause.

Despite these efforts, growing trend of displacement is alarming. We
need to think about it and suggest practical steps to arrest such trend.
This august forum as always will be pivotal to identify the core issues
and to work for refugees earliest and durable solutions.

Mr. Chairman

When 85% refugees are being hosted by developing countries that have
limited resources, the burden becomes more difficult and

disproportionate. Pakistan is the second highest refugees' hosting country and half of world's protracted refugees.

Our Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Imran Khan has announced several measures for the benefit of refugees in the country. Our politics and society have upheld a positive sentiment towards refugees. The Government's benevolent policies towards refugees reflect these broader national sentiments.

Excellences

Pakistan has demonstrated unparalleled generosity and hospitality in hosting Afghan refugees for the last 40 years, and adhered to the highest standards of protection and facilitation.

This enormous task is being greatly facilitated through efficient organizational structures, dedicated staff and credible documentation.

Our commitment to refugees' issue is evident from the fact that our Prime Minister would be co-convener at Global Refugees Forum to be held in December this year in Geneva.

Distinguished Delegates

Pakistan has always looked after refugees on humanitarian basis and expects our partners the same. Pakistan is facing economic challenges, which coupled with host fatigue and dwindling International support has further aggravated the situation. Despite limited resources, billions of dollars have been spent by the Government on refugees. Colossal wear and tear to infrastructure, burden on health, education sectors along with difficulties in services providing entities are becoming acute by the day.

Thus in such situations, quick and predictable response from our global partners for burden and responsibility sharing is earnestly required.

Honourable Delegates

We are sure that UNHCR's global policies are beneficial, still emphasis should be on country and region specific requirements and capacities, especially under-stress education and Health sectors.

My country appreciates the contribution of our partners towards Refugees Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative. Though it covers only a fraction of what has been incurred by Pakistan, still it helps in social cohesion. However, the gradual reduction of funds towards RAHA would adversely impact this positive initiative.

Excellencies

Pakistan along with its regional partners, has decided to continue with Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) till December 2021, emphasising its three pillars that are voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan and support to the host countries.

While we take note of the concept of Support Platform for SSAR, the additional partners' participation should not be a substitute to our traditional global partners' contributions where underlying principle was the humanitarian assistance in Refugees' management and repatriation.

Mr. Chairman

The refugees of the world pin high hopes from the improved financial prospects and political support for easing their sufferings. The refugee hosting countries are faced with their own financial and economic

constraints. They would not want to be burdened further with additional loans.

While acknowledging the availability of complementary funding sources to support host communities by the development partners, we insist that only humanitarian grants should be for refugees rather than loans. This is a major deviation from the previously agreed international norm, that refugees are a humanitarian matter, thus a collective responsibility of the international community.

Such financial decisions might have implications for the long term interest of refugees also. These might lead to creating anti-refugee sentiments in the host community and compromising their dignity.

Excellencies

It is our stated policy that all Refugees should be fully respected with free access to Government's basic education, health services and other facilities. While Pakistan is taking care of about million Afghan urban refugees that moved from camps due to stoppage of assistance by the International Community, we are also looking after half a million camp based refugees, and effectively trying to re-establish the shrinking services there.

Distinguished Delegates

Imbued with the same spirit, the Prime Minister of Pakistan under special dispensation allowed Afghan refugees to open bank accounts that greatly helped them in their businesses. To address issues being faced by Afghan refugees and to guide them, Advisory Cells and Facilitation Centres have been established.

Pakistan adheres to the policy of safety and protection of all Afghan Refugees and follows the principle of voluntary and dignified repatriation. Despite enduring challenges and massive financial and social costs, we will continue with this principle.

I acknowledge the support and contribution of our partners, especially the UNHCR in helping us for this noble resolve. Still, I sincerely urge all our global partners, especially those that are specifically mandated to match our efforts through generous and continued support for this humanitarian cause.

Mr. Chairman,

As we deliberate upon global refugee challenge, we must be mindful to the peaceful settlement of conflicts and wars that cause refugee situations. Peace is the greater incentive for sustainable return of refugees. Peace and stability in Afghanistan is also critical for, not only regional stability and economic development but also for sustainable return of Afghan refugees. Pakistan has consistently supported Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and would continue our efforts for durable peace in Afghanistan.

We have always urged the international community to fully support and generously contribute to development of Afghanistan and the region as a whole. This initiative and efforts of Govt. of Afghanistan for peace and stability in their country, along with the repatriation grant restored to its past level of 400 dollars, would provide enabling environment for quick repatriation and sustainable reintegration in their home country.

Excellencies

I also take this opportunity to share the Prime Minister of Pakistan's vision on Statelessness. Not only is the Prime Minister sympathetic towards Stateless population, he on many occasions talked of a policy that would facilitate them. The 500 Million rupees Afghan Citizen Card project covered unidentified people, gave identity to 840,000 Afghan citizens. For other nationalities, our Government authorized NADRA, our state of the art organization, for their identities and data bank. Through this initiative, the registration of potential stateless would be much easier and transparent with expected facilitation in future.

Mr. Chairman,

The recent increase in refugees worldwide remind us that something significant needs to be done towards prevention and solutions of conflicts, reduction of inequalities, elimination of poverty and provide right to development for all. The respect for international law and UN Charter can prevent from emergence of such crises.

Let me conclude by reiterating our continued support and commitment for protection of refugees, durable peace, and stability in the world.

I Thank you All