

**High Commissioner's Opening Statement to the 62nd Session of ExCom  
Palais des Nations, Geneva**

**3 October 2011**

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

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this sixty-second session of the Executive Committee. I would like to extend an especially warm welcome to our newest EXCOM members: Bulgaria, Cameroon, Croatia, the Republic of Congo, Togo and Turkmenistan.

I want to start by paying tribute to the commitment and courage of UNHCR staff, and to the families who support them. Without their passion for our work, and without their readiness to spend years of their lives in some of the world's most desolate and dangerous places, I would have little to say here today.

Too many humanitarian workers are paying for their commitment with their lives. UNHCR lost one colleague in Sudan earlier this year, and another was seriously wounded in the recent bomb attack on the UN in Abuja.

Altogether, some 53 UN staff were killed in 2011, as well as 30 from implementing partners.

One year ago, I had the opportunity to speak in detail about the shrinking of humanitarian space. Although I do not propose to address this issue again, the danger we face is no less real today.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an important year for UNHCR, as we commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

It has also been an extremely challenging year. Against a backdrop of multiple other dramatic events, namely in the context of the Arab Spring, 2011 has been marked by a quick succession of three major emergencies that have tested our capacities and that of our partners. At 60 years old, these events have reminded us of the essence of why UNHCR was established: to protect refugees. And indeed the major emergencies of 2011 have been refugee emergencies.

During the final weeks of 2010, thousands of refugees fled Côte d'Ivoire after the disputed elections. Over the next few months, more than 200,000 Ivorians sought asylum in neighbouring countries, most of them in Liberia. Simultaneously, hundreds of thousands were displaced inside Côte d'Ivoire, particularly around Abidjan and in the western region.

In the years preceding the emergency in Liberia, UNHCR's field presence had been reduced significantly, and our initial response was slower than we would have liked it to be. A meaningful scale-up of our capacity and collaboration with national and international partners were essential to tackling the immense challenges that confronted us in the remote border areas.

At the height of the Côte d'Ivoire crisis, another large-scale emergency started in North Africa. Following the outbreak of violence in Libya, around one and a half million people – including migrants and refugees – crossed the borders to neighbouring countries. During the peak of displacement in March, 15 to 20,000 people a day were crossing into Tunisia and Egypt. The capacities of those countries were quickly overstretched.

The International Organization for Migration – whose Director-General I would like to thank here today – and UNHCR started a major humanitarian evacuation of third country nationals who had fled from Libya and needed international assistance to get back home. In our joint effort, led by IOM with the support of governments, more than 1,600 flights were organized, helping 157,000 people to return.

Some 5,000 people from third countries had no place to go back to – namely Somalia and Eritrea – sought asylum in Tunisia and Egypt. More than a million Libyans also crossed the borders, although the vast majority has since returned home. Tens of thousands of refugees and migrants fled by boat across the Mediterranean, many of them perishing on the way.

Among those most vulnerable to the violence in Libya were – and continue to be – people originating from sub-Saharan Africa. Many of them come from war-torn countries. I appeal to the National Transitional Council to ensure their safety in Libya. Refugees and migrant workers must not be confused with mercenaries.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

With these two full-blown displacement crises already on our hands in the spring, the worst was yet to come. As drought continued to worsen amid the decades-old conflict in Somalia, more than 270,000 people fled the country, bringing the total number of Somali refugees in the region to a staggering 900,000. Another 1.5 million are internally displaced. This means nearly a third of the entire population of Somalia has been forced from their homes.

Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti have generously borne the brunt of this mass exodus. The world's largest refugee camp, Dadaab in Kenya, has grown to five times its intended size, housing more than 450,000 people. Thanks to additional land that was made available by the Government of Kenya – whom I would like to thank here – new sites around Dadaab have opened since June. More than 50,000 refugees have already been relocated there, helping to decongest the hopelessly overcrowded camp. But people continue to arrive at a rate of a thousand a day.

In the Dollo Ado camps in Ethiopia, we saw the most distressing levels of mortality and malnutrition at the peak of the crisis – levels unprecedented in any crisis. Up to

two-thirds of newly arriving children were acutely malnourished, and in one camp the daily mortality rate exceeded 7 deaths per 10,000. Following a massive concerted effort with our partners, acute malnutrition has now dropped to below 35 per cent, and mortality rates have reduced to 1 per 10,000 per day. However, these levels are still too high, particularly among very young children.

Inside Somalia, we play a more modest role, leading the Protection Cluster and providing internally displaced people with emergency relief packages. Our assistance has now reached nearly 400,000 people.

These rolling emergencies have put an enormous stress on us. During the first nine months of 2011, we deployed more than 600 emergency staff to 36 countries. That's two and a half times as many as in previous years. At one point in June, some 300 members of our staff were deployed at the same time – 60 more than during the entire year of 2010.

Our emergency stockpiles and delivery capacity have also been put to the proof. We airlifted an average of 70 tons of shelter and other relief items each week in 2011, more than tripling the volume dispatched in 2010.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Displacement continues to grow worldwide as new conflicts multiply and old ones fail to be resolved. Some 43.7 million people are now uprooted due to conflict and persecution, the highest number in over 15 years. In 2011 alone, another 750,000 people became refugees in other countries.

At the same time, it looks as though old crises never die. Afghanistan, Iraq and the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo are just a few examples. And recently, continued hostilities in Sudan's Blue Nile State as well as South Kordofan and Abyei have caused the displacement of several tens of thousands of people, including two weeks ago 25,000 who sought refuge in Ethiopia from Blue Nile and some 10,000 who fled the Nuba Mountains to South Sudan just in the last months.

In this scenario of drawn-out conflict, durable solutions – a central part of UNHCR's mandate – are becoming more and more difficult to achieve. Seventy percent of the refugees of concern to UNHCR – more than seven million people – now live in prolonged situations of exile.

This bleak picture shows how important it is to intensify the implementation of our Global Plan of Action on protracted refugee situations. But we need to recognise that there is no humanitarian solution for these problems – the solution is always political. It cannot be achieved without committed involvement by key national, regional and global actors.

Somalia probably represents the most complex global refugee challenge today. To tackle it better, I intend to convene a high-level panel to help us formulate a set of proposals for possible initiatives by the international community leading to solutions for this long-standing refugee population.

On the positive side, I am very encouraged by the determination of the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, who are joining hands to resolve once and for all the refugee situation in the Western Balkans. These efforts, which prove that solutions are possible when there is political will, now require the support of the international community.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

With old conflicts increasingly intractable, and new ones proliferating, voluntary repatriation figures are at their lowest in 20 years. Fewer than 200,000 refugees chose to return home in 2010, against an annual average of over a million in the last two decades.

Given the limited opportunities for voluntary return, resettlement has become even more vital.

We have recently passed several important landmarks in our resettlement efforts. Over 50,000 refugees from Bhutan have left for resettlement from Nepal. In late July, the number of Iraqi refugees to depart passed the 65,000 mark, with more than 100,000 having been submitted. Around the same time, the 70,000<sup>th</sup> refugee from Myanmar set off from Thailand for her new home in the United States of America.

But resettlement opportunities still fall far short of the needs. The number of places made available annually has remained at about 80,000 for the past three years. Global resettlement needs surpass the annual capacity of receiving states by a ratio of ten to one.

UNHCR decreased the number of its resettlement submissions from 128,000 in 2009 to 108,000 in 2010, to avoid building up too large a backlog. Only 73,000 refugees departed for resettlement during last year, 14 per cent less than in 2009.

I cannot overemphasize the urgency of making resettlement places available to refugees. For many of them, it is nothing short of life-saving. Last year, more than 8,000 refugees were brought to safety through emergency resettlement procedures, when they were under serious threat in their countries of asylum.

Nonetheless, utilizing resettlement as an emergency response has proven challenging, due to rigid quota allocations, lengthy processing times and restrictive profile requirements.

Our emergency resettlement efforts in the Libya crisis have demonstrated these limitations all too clearly. While some 2,600 refugees have been submitted, fewer than 450 have departed so far, some of them to emergency transit centres where they await further processing. To mitigate these difficulties, I hope resettlement countries will consider the establishment of a pool of emergency slots to be activated during dramatic outflows.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The third durable solution is local integration, a complex and sometimes slow-moving process. UNHCR continues to assist refugees to prepare for local integration in various parts of the world, including West Africa, Tanzania, Eastern Europe, and under the Cities of Solidarity initiative in Latin America.

Self-reliance programmes are also being supported in a growing number of situations, so that refugees can contribute to the development of their host countries. This includes a new self-reliance strategy in southern Chad for 55,000 Central African refugees, and the joint UNHCR/UNDP Transitional Solutions Initiative in eastern Sudan which promises to help long-staying Eritrean refugees become self-sufficient in the years to come.

In another large protracted situation, that of Afghans, innovative responses by the concerned governments are now creating new opportunities. In Afghanistan, there will be a more targeted and focused reintegration programme, run jointly with UNDP. In Pakistan, the Government's comprehensive Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees combines host community support with the development of alternative interim stay arrangements for certain groups of refugees.

The decision of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to make work permits available to registered Afghan refugees is another example of creative responses to a long-standing challenge. Together with the provision of health insurance coverage to some 200,000 people, supported by UNHCR, this is an important step towards increasing self-reliance.

These bold new approaches should be matched by international solidarity. To this end UNHCR and the three concerned governments are developing a multi-year solutions strategy for Afghan refugees in the sub-region, to be presented at an international stakeholder conference in early 2012.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

We cannot forget the enormous challenges that local integration and self-reliance represent for host states in the Global South in particular. Developing countries accommodate eight of every ten refugees today, making the most fundamental contribution to their protection.

Last year, I promised that UNHCR would commission a study to define possible methodologies to estimate the cost and impact of hosting large refugee populations.

The African Centre for Migration and Society at Witwatersrand University in South Africa has since been tasked with this review and is currently developing an analytical framework to be used in relevant countries of asylum.

Executive Committee members have been invited to establish a Steering Committee to guide this project and ensure that it is effectively followed up.

It has long been clear that host states in the developing world cannot be expected to bear the burden of large-scale refugee presence by themselves. Allow me to reiterate a call I have made before to this Committee, for a “new deal in burden-sharing”. It is a call for active solidarity with the developing world, with the countries that bear the brunt of the effects of forced displacement.

Development assistance targeting refugee-hosting areas is key to make this work. Funding is essential, but solidarity cannot only be measured in financial terms. Resettlement is one vital form of burden-sharing. Mobility and managed migration policies are another.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNHCR’s engagement with internally displaced persons continued to be an important pillar of our operations. In 2010, we provided protection and assistance to some 14.7 million in 29 countries, in most of which we led one or more of the three clusters under our global responsibility - protection, emergency shelter and camp coordination/camp management.

Some 2.9 million internally displaced were able to return to their communities last year, most of them in Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.

Six years after the introduction of the cluster approach, we are fully engaged in the current reform efforts led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and OCHA. They aim to improve collective results in leadership, coordination, accountability, preparedness and communications. The steps we are taking to further strengthen our protection and emergency response capacities are well aligned with this process.

There have been several rounds of intense discussions over the past year regarding the role UNHCR should play in protecting people displaced by natural disasters.

An agreement has not yet been reached on a more predictable engagement in leading the protection cluster at country level in natural disasters, and so we will go on operating on a case by case basis, like in the past. It goes without saying that UNHCR can not refuse to help when we are requested to do so, as when floods struck Pakistan again just a few weeks ago.

The most devastating natural disaster in 2011 was the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan. It left almost 20,000 people dead or missing. I wish to express once more our heartfelt sympathy with the people of Japan for this terrible tragedy. We have been humbled by their bravery and steadfastness, and by their profound generosity towards the world’s refugees and displaced people, even during these most difficult times.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to touch briefly on UNHCR's internal reform process. It has been five years since we embarked on this ambitious and at times thorny path. Today, the results speak for themselves. We have increased our efficiency considerably, with Headquarters costs reduced from 14 to 9 per cent of overall expenditure and staff costs from 41 to 27 per cent.

Last year, the savings from the outposting to Budapest amounted to some 15 million US dollars. These and other reductions helped us make a significant investment in early 2011 to address key gaps in water, sanitation, health and nutrition, benefiting some 1.3 million refugees in Africa and Asia.

The two items from the earlier reform programme which remained to be completed at the time of my last statement were the restructuring and decentralization of the Division of Information Systems and Telecoms, and a number of elements of the human resources reform.

By the end of this year, 49 ICT positions will have moved from Geneva to the newly created Service Centre in Amman, and a few of them to Budapest and Panama City. This will allow UNHCR to bring IT support closer to the field and strengthen our response to operational needs.

As regards human resources, the Joint Advisory Committee, with representatives from staff and management, is now being consulted on the proposed policies for recruitment, conversions, contracts and a new strategy to reduce the number of staff in-between assignments.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Structural reform cannot be an end in itself. This is why much of our energy has been dedicated to improving our ability to deliver. As I announced last year, recent priorities have been strengthening our protection and emergency response capacities.

Earlier in 2011, UNHCR advertised 42 new structural protection posts across the globe in areas such as resettlement, refugee status determination, statelessness and cluster leadership. For those positions that were advertised externally, we received nearly 4,300 applications. For UNHCR, this is a chance to recruit a number of excellent new staff and reinforce our operational response to increasingly complex protection challenges.

In addition, we had created 14 new protection posts in Sudan and 32 in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in late 2010. All but three of these positions have since been filled, significantly enhancing our capacity to provide protection by presence.

Protection learning is also being strengthened, with a dozen new or updated courses that will benefit several hundred UNHCR and partner staff in 2012.

Regarding the second priority, this year's extraordinary pressure on our emergency response capacity has amply testified to the wisdom of investments made to strengthen it.

With the full implementation of our global stock management system, we can now rely on a centrally managed network of seven supply hubs located in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. This network has enabled us to make significant savings on airlifts and, together with a 20 per cent increase in our stock levels, allows us now to respond within 72 hours to simultaneous emergencies of up to 600,000 persons.

We have broadened our staff deployment mechanisms to include all Headquarters departments and field operations in a corporate emergency roster. We have also created one for senior managers to provide the required leadership in emergencies. Some 25 staff at the P5 to D2 level are now on standby for deployment. Technical experts from all divisions and external standby partners complement this enhanced staffing capacity.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

2011 has also clearly shown that we need to improve further. Following consultations at the Global Representatives meeting earlier this year, we decided to embark on a series of new organizational priorities for the near future. Allow me to touch briefly on the two most important of them.

Firstly, to further enhance our organisational response to emergencies, we are developing a new staffing model that will allow not only for quicker deployments at the outset of a crisis, but also for a more structured way of transitioning to the post-emergency phase, so as to guarantee sustainability. We will establish a faster internal resource allocation mechanism and allow UNHCR's refugee funding appeals to be issued within three days of the declaration of an emergency, with the participation of interested partner organisations.

Likewise, UNHCR is reinforcing coordination and support capacities to facilitate a more predictable and accountable interagency engagement in refugee outflows. Our strong, effective and credible leadership in these outflows is critical to making it work.

A robust investment in our information management capabilities is another key factor in this respect. Building on lessons learned in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, an operational data portal in the Horn of Africa is already providing up-to-date registration statistics, maps and sectoral reports in interaction with all partners in Ethiopia and Kenya. This has shown us the way to go forward, and we will also be drawing on OCHA's experience in this field in the near future.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we consolidate results-based management, the second priority we have set ourselves for the coming period is improved accountability, financial and programme control, and risk management.

We have already made progress with all of you on the establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, as agreed with member states last year. The recruitment process for its five members is now on-going. I hope they can take up their functions by early 2012.

UNHCR's volume of activity has nearly doubled in the past five years, with only a marginal increase in staff globally and a significant reduction in Geneva. This strong focus on efficiency gains enabled us to cope with the enormous challenges facing us, and to adapt to a changing humanitarian landscape. We could not go on unnecessarily spending within the organisation what was vitally needed for the people we care for.

But having said so, now is the time to address some of the gaps that emerged during this process. We need to bring our oversight mechanisms to a level that is commensurate with our significantly increased budget. Over the next two years we will strengthen our accountability system, equip our staff with better knowledge and capacity for sound financial management and control, and introduce a new risk management framework for the organisation.

These priorities will go hand in hand with a strong effort to simplify organisational processes and systematically promote innovation to benefit our work and the people we care for.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

A word about funding. I am enormously grateful for the unprecedented level of contributions that UNHCR has received in recent years from the donor community. Despite the heavy pressure on many government budgets, donors have once again increased their support in 2010, providing 1.86 billion US dollars in voluntary contributions. Their generous response to the many emergencies this year will result in an even higher figure by the end of 2011.

We are conscious that in order to sustain this support, we must continue to improve our delivery and our accountability.

We are intensifying our efforts to broaden UNHCR's income base and reach out to a broader range of donors. Targeted investments in private sector fundraising have borne fruit, with the level of contributions now nearly four times as high as in 2005. The IKEA Foundation project in Dadaab is the most recent example.

Our income from pooled funds and other multilateral sources has grown for the fifth consecutive year in 2011, including a recent contribution of 30 million US dollars from the World Bank for health, nutrition, water and sanitation in the Horn of Africa.

Allow me to make an appeal in this context for unrestricted or flexibly earmarked funding. I am deeply grateful to donors who provide the majority of their contributions with little or no earmarking. These funds are our lifeline. They can be used several times over, allowing us to kick-start one operation and then moving them elsewhere as earmarked resources arrive.

Only some 18 per cent of our income in 2010 was totally unrestricted, while 55 per cent was tightly earmarked. More donor flexibility is critical in ensuring comparable levels of assistance across all operations, especially because many of these situations are untouched by the spotlight of media attention. Our consistent reduction in relative structural and Headquarters costs has meant that more and more unearmarked funding is now being used for refugees and other people of concern. It would of course be unacceptable to ask for more unearmarked funding if that would be used to feed a bureaucratic monster.

I also wish to touch once more on the importance of partnership for everything we do. The number of our implementing partners has increased to almost 900, 60 per cent of which are national NGOs. Nearly 38 per cent of our budget is now implemented by partners. That's some 350 million US dollars more than in 2005.

But we do not see NGOs as mere implementing agencies. They are becoming increasingly strategic partners, from policy development to joint planning and action on the ground. The Red Cross and Red Crescent movement is another example of such a strategic partnership.

Our cooperation with other UN operational agencies continues to be vitally important for our work. We have updated our long-standing Memorandum of Understanding with the World Food Programme to include new operational priorities like anaemia and food assistance in urban settings. And I would like to express my very deep thanks to WFP: In the most remote environments of the world wherever you see UNHCR staff you see WFP staff cooperating with us.

We have also agreed with UNICEF on a new framework to strengthen the predictability and effectiveness of our collaboration in refugee emergencies.

Another key aspect of partnership, the wide-ranging and constructive debates of the annual Protection Dialogues have led to substantial policy changes on mixed migratory movements, protracted refugee situations and urban refugees. I am honoured by the strong involvement Member States have shown in this respect.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In December last year, the Dialogue on Protection Gaps set out a number of critical areas where we must improve the situation of the people we care for. The conclusions of those discussions have guided us throughout 2011 as we've been commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Refugee and Reduction of Stateless Conventions.

In December 2011, these commemorations will culminate in an inter-governmental event at ministerial level. This will be an opportunity for States to reaffirm and recommit to the principles of refugee protection. Sixty years after the 1951 Refugee Convention was drafted, we hope that States will make concrete pledges of specific actions to improve the international protection regime, at home and abroad.

This could include decisions to accede to the conventions or withdraw reservations that restrict their full implementation, to establish or improve asylum systems, or to increase government engagement in refugee status determination. Creating or enlarging resettlement programs, offering local integration opportunities, initiatives to reduce racism and xenophobia or collaboration with other states to share burdens and address regional challenges are other examples of possible pledges.

In 2011 UNHCR has made enormous efforts to put statelessness more prominently on the international agenda. While these efforts are slowly starting to bear fruit, the road is still long. The lack of a nationality remains a fundamental problem, yet it is still far too often overlooked.

For the estimated 12 – some even say 15 – million people affected worldwide, the consequences of statelessness can be devastating: social exclusion, the denial of human rights, barriers to education and development, or heightened vulnerability to abuse and trafficking.

We have spent this past year tirelessly advocating for legislative reforms to reduce the risks of statelessness. In many countries, the changes required are simple – like ensuring that mothers can pass their nationality to their children the same way fathers do. This is a win-win approach, helping to reduce statelessness and promoting gender equality.

There has been steady progress on reducing statelessness in the past few years, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. Since 2009, we estimate that close to 300,000 people have acquired a nationality around the world. In addition, the number of States Parties to the statelessness conventions continues to grow, with four new countries already having acceded to one or both of these instruments since January 2011 and several others announcing they will do it by the end of the year. I am optimistic that many States will announce steps to address statelessness at the Ministerial meeting in December.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The multitude of refugee crises this past year has tested the international community's commitment to provide protection space to those seeking safety across borders. The test has shown that refugee protection is very much alive. All countries neighbouring this year's crises zones deserve the gratitude and solidarity of the international community for their enormous generosity and their respect for the values of international protection.

Liberia, Ghana, Guinea and Togo all kept their borders open when more than 200,000 Ivorian refugees fled their country.

Many refugees who arrived in host communities in Liberia were from the same villages in Côte d'Ivoire that had sheltered their Liberian neighbours when they themselves had fled during their country's 14 years of civil war. On a visit to Nimba County, I was struck to see Liberian farmers sharing their seed rice for the next planting season to feed the newcomers. In a region that has made much progress in resolving the conflict and displacement of the previous decade, the fundamental human values of solidarity and hospitality still run strong.

All the countries bordering Libya showed the same firm commitment to providing protection space when hundreds of thousands fled that conflict. Even throughout the most fragile period of their own transition, Tunisia and Egypt kept their borders open.

Without wanting to enter the European debate on migration and the future of the Schengen regime, it is important to recognize that Italy and Malta also received nearly 30,000 people who fled from Libya across the Mediterranean Sea. The Italian Guardia Costiera and Guardia di Finanza deserve particular praise for their admirable work in rescue at sea, which saved thousands of lives in 2011 alone.

Further east, Turkey and Lebanon also kept their borders open for all those who crossed them in search of refuge.

And the list goes on. As they have been doing for two decades, Somalia's neighbours – Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen -- have continued to take in all those who arrived at their borders seeking safety and survival. Their generosity testifies to the strength of their long-standing dedication to refugee protection.

This year's winner of the Nansen Refugee Award, the Yemen-based Society for Humanitarian Solidarity, is emblematic of this commitment.

Even in countries that continue to experience dramatic internal turmoil, refugee protection has been fully preserved. In Syria, UNHCR and its local partners have been able to continue programmes for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees. Nor has Yemen's internal crisis changed the country's policy of granting *prima facie* refugee status to all Somalis arriving at its shores.

The principles enshrined in the Refugee Convention, and reflected in the strong value of solidarity in many cultures and religions of the world, have withstood some very tough tests this year. I am encouraged to see so many states uphold these principles even under the most difficult circumstances.

Having said that, however, there is a worrying trend in many parts of the world that continues to threaten the protection space available to refugees. Racism and xenophobia are not the preserve of extremists or homicidal individuals. Similar sentiments are expressed by populist politicians and some irresponsible elements of the media – sentiments that are not always opposed with sufficient energy and courage by mainstream political and social movements.

Racism and xenophobia diminish us all. But the discrimination and intolerance to which they give rise, do not affect us equally. Refugees, asylum seekers and people without a nationality suffer disproportionately.

In anxious times such as the one we are living in, messages of otherness and exclusion play on common fears of the new and unfamiliar. High levels of anti-foreigner feelings in many states where they arrive pose a real threat to the lives and well-being of refugees, and undermine the universal values of tolerance and respect for human dignity. Governments need to address the legitimate security, social and economic concerns of their citizens. But if there is a message for us to get across it is surely that human rights are for all, including the forcibly displaced.

In my view, multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious societies are not only a good thing, they are inevitable. Building tolerant and open communities is a slow and delicate process. But non-discrimination is a core human rights principle, and it is the duty of all states to acknowledge and give effect to it. Refugees cannot become collateral damage of anti-immigrant attitudes and policies.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me return to the Horn of Africa.

When I visited Dollo Ado in south-eastern Ethiopia in July, I spoke to a Somali refugee woman named Musleema who had just arrived a couple of days before. She had walked for two weeks from her village in Somalia. Three of her six children had died along the way, the others were receiving emergency care and struggling to survive.

This family was just one of the hundreds of thousands of victims of a humanitarian crisis that has reached unimaginable proportions. It is the worst I have seen in my time as High Commissioner – the result of decades of conflict, drought and food insecurity in a region increasingly impacted by the effects of climate change.

All of us could see this escalation coming from a long way away. Nonetheless, we, the international community, were slow to react to signs that things were starting to deteriorate. What is worse, we also didn't have the capacity to prevent them from getting this bad in the first place.

The prevention of conflict, adaptation to climate change and risk management of natural disasters are all areas in which the international community needs to do much more. The failure to do so will only cause further dramatic suffering, inevitably forcing increasing numbers of people to flee.

We live in a dangerous world. Intractable conflict is compounded, if not exacerbated by the simultaneous impact of population growth, urbanization, climate change and food, water and energy insecurity. At the same time, the world lacks the governance capacity to deal with these challenges. There is no effective multilateral approach to any of them.

We no longer live in a bipolar or a unipolar world. Neither have we built a truly multipolar world, and much less one with real and effective multilateral governance mechanisms.

Unpredictability has become the name of the game. Crises are multiplying. Conflicts are becoming more complex. And solutions are proving to be more and more elusive. In such challenging circumstances we must recognize our shared responsibility. And we must exercise our shared commitment.

Thank you very much.

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