



Chairperson's Summary of the *International Conference on Forty Years of Hosting Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: A New Partnership for Solidarity*

18 February 2020, Islamabad, Pakistan

The *International Conference on Forty Years of Hosting Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: A New Partnership for Solidarity* took place on 17-18 February 2020 in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The Conference was convened by the Government of Pakistan, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to mark forty years since the beginning of the Afghan displacement, to demonstrate solidarity with Afghan refugees and the countries and communities that have so generously hosted them, to renew commitment to finding solutions, and to galvanize more equitable and predictable burden and responsibility sharing in the context of one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world.

The event was attended by more than 500 participants, including the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Second Vice President of Afghanistan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ministers and other high-ranking representatives of Governments, international organizations, humanitarian and development agencies, international financial institutions, civil society, private sector, academia, media, as well as refugees.

While the conference provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the achievements, challenges and lessons learned over the past forty years, it also stressed the urgent need to move away from the status quo towards a renewed partnership for solidarity, building on the outcomes of the Global Compact on Refugees and the first Global Refugee Forum.

In this spirit, many delegates cautioned that the world was witnessing a rising tide of populism, nationalism and ethnocentrism, and urged the international community that it was more imperative than ever before to take collective action to thwart such attitudes and tendencies. The participants stressed the need to ensure that the commitments of the Global Refugee Forum materialize and encouraged UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan to work together to identify particular pledges which may be relevant for the Afghan refugee situation.

The participants applauded the unparalleled solidarity and hospitality of the Governments and people of Pakistan and Iran, despite facing their own security and socio-economic challenges, and commended their inclusive policies towards Afghan refugees, some of which have inspired

the Global Compact on Refugees. While participants appreciated the robust support of the international community for Afghan refugees over the past decades, it was widely acknowledged that the international support for the two principal host countries has significantly declined over the past years and that their commendable efforts must be met with more commensurate and equitable burden and responsibility-sharing by the international community.

The Conference recognized and highly appreciated Pakistan's generosity and progressive policies that have enabled millions of Afghan refugees and nationals to access refuge, health, education, livelihoods and social mobility without discrimination, for over four decades. Participants were informed of the Prime Minister's special dispensation to allow Afghan refugees to open bank accounts in order to facilitate their participation in the formal economy and enable self-reliance. The Conference also noted that these resilience-building and solutions-oriented measures would enhance the potential of Afghan refugees to sustainably reintegrate upon return and contribute to the development of Afghanistan. Additional efforts are being undertaken to enable Afghan nationals to obtain legal travel documents and benefit from the generous visa policy of Pakistan.

It was proposed that whilst voluntary repatriation has been pursued over four decades, it has now become imperative to move towards timebound and well resourced, mutually agreed roadmap for repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

The Conference called for accelerated efforts to increase resettlement opportunities and open complementary pathways for Afghan refugees, including in the form of expanded scholarships and livelihood opportunities.

Appreciating the continued generosity of the host countries, the participants stressed that the ultimate solution lies in Afghanistan and that repatriation and sustainable reintegration is one of the solutions for the majority of Afghan refugees. Noting the reinvigorated signals of a possible pathway for peace, participants highlighted that to enable sustainable return and reintegration, a pre-requisite would be a comprehensive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process and urgent investments in the priority areas of return and reintegration in Afghanistan. Absence of necessary global support and resource allocation was also considered as a major impediment to the repatriation of Afghan refugees.

The Conference acknowledged that the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) could yield peace dividends for the entire region, provided that there is a firm political will to implement it. It was also cautioned that spoilers of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan should not be given a chance.

The participants noted that slow progress has been made within the framework of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) and that a mutually agreed roadmap must overcome the barriers that prevent pursuit of meaningful solutions for generations of displaced Afghans, the majority of whom are children and youth. Robust investments in the human capital, resilience and portable skills of refugee youth in host countries enable young Afghans to contribute to their host communities pending return; while simultaneously enhancing their

potential to sustainably reintegrate and pro-actively participate in the nation-building and reconstruction processes in Afghanistan upon return.

A panel discussion led by the UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador and attended by female refugees and representatives of civil society and private sector highlighted the importance of pro-active participation of women and girls in decision-making processes.

While there is hope that the revitalized peace efforts, leading to an intra-Afghan reconciliation process, will pave the way for a better future for the people of Afghanistan and for the gradual return of refugees, it was emphasized that sustainable peace and security can only be achieved through immediate and better integrated humanitarian, development and peace efforts. It was underscored that repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees should be part of any peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

To this end, the participants called for reinvigorated support for Afghanistan's national development plans, including targeted investments into the Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration, identified by the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR which are fully aligned with Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework, including the Citizens' Charter.

The Support Platform for the SSAR, launched in December 2019, provides an important momentum and opportunity to redefine the way in which the international community as a whole responds to the Afghan refugee situation, in recognition of the inclusive policies of the host countries, enhanced support for host communities and renewed commitment of the Government of Afghanistan to create an environment conducive to return and voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees in dignity and safety and their sustainable reintegration. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan rolled out a seven-point agenda aimed at addressing the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan and operationalizing the SSAR Support Platform, including a proposal to establish an international fund to support the return of Afghan refugees.

The participants noted that the collective ability of the international community to deliver on the key objectives of the Support Platform will be a litmus test for the Global Compact on Refugees – its applicability to the most protracted refugee situations and its promise of greater responsibility-sharing with countries that have shouldered the burden. To this end, the participants emphasized the need to strengthen the existing partnerships and to forge new ones to broaden and diversify the base of support through engagement of non-traditional donors, development agencies, private sector and other relevant stakeholders.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is requested to bring this Chairperson's Summary to the attention of UNHCR's Executive Committee to consider and develop a strategy for its implementation, under a relevant agenda item.
