



**Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN  
Geneva**

**Statement**

**71<sup>st</sup> Session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR**

**Statement by Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan Minister for States  
and Frontier Regions (SARFON)**  
**(06 October 2020)**

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

It is an honor for me to lead the Pakistan delegation to the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of Executive Committee of the UNHCR.

The year 2019 has indeed been of immense value in addressing the key questions related to welfare of refugees by adopting GRF across the globe and launching of Support Platform under SSAR at regional level.

It was, however, a very challenging period as we had to face Covid-19 pandemic and its negative fallout in many areas. We commend the UNHCR leadership and the field staff for their hard work and dedication to fight the on-going COVID pandemic.

We also commend the UNHCR for their timely assistance to refugees during COVID-19 crisis.

**Mr. Chairman**

Pakistan even today hosts more than 1.4 million Afghan refugees and 850,000 Afghan Citizen Card holders along with other segments of Afghans. Given that 85% refugees continue to be hosted by developing countries with limited resources, the burden becomes more difficult and disproportionate.

The COVID-19 outbreak has presented new challenges. It has disrupted economies and societies in unprecedented ways. It has wiped off decades of development gains and heightened risks of high unemployment, poverty and hunger among the locals and the refugees alike.

They would, therefore, require greater international humanitarian support and solidarity through enhanced liquidity and debt relief, among other steps.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Pakistan despite its economic and social pressures has demonstrated unparalleled generosity and hospitality in hosting Afghan refugees for four decades and adhered to the highest standards of protection and facilitation, which continued with more vigour during the pandemic.

We have provided same health facilities to Afghan refugees and other segments of Afghans as extended to Pakistanis. They have free enrolment in government primary schools and access to higher and professional education with generous scholarships. Plentiful livelihood opportunities are open to them with permission to open banks accounts.

On the lines as being provided to vulnerable Pakistani families under Ehsaas Program, we, with UNHCR are providing cash assistance of Rs.12,000 per family to 36,500 extremely vulnerable Afghan refugees' families. With support of donors, we intend to extend it to 85,000 families.

We value the contribution of our partners towards Refugees Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative. Though it covers only a fraction of what has been invested by Pakistan, still it helps in advancing social cohesion.

Pakistan along with its regional partners and UNHCR has launched the SSAR Support Platform on the basis of its three pillars that include: enabling conditions for voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan and support to the host countries.

We welcome the core group of supporters of SSAR Support Platform. Their support and solidarity on political and financing tracks would be vital to the success of this Platform. We look forward to work closely with UNHCR, Afghanistan, Iran and international partners in the shared pursuit of durable solutions.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Govt. of Pakistan remains committed to the spirit of voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees in safety and dignity. However, this commitment needs to be strengthened through joint return and repatriation plans with time lines and targets.

We are, however, concerned that the number, pace and percentage of voluntary repatriations has drastically declined in recent years.

In Pakistan, during 2019 only 6,220 Afghan refugees returned voluntarily, a significant drop from previous years. The repatriation program was suspended earlier in the year due to COVID-19, and has now resumed, but the response again is not encouraging.

Reversing these trends need concrete steps on part of international community, based on the principle of burden- and responsibility sharing in an equitable manner.

The Islamabad Conference, held in February this year called for a time-bound, well-resourced, mutually agreed roadmap for repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees. The participants called for accelerated opportunities of resettlement and opening of complementary pathways for Afghan refugees.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Peace and stability in Afghanistan is critical for not only regional stability and economic development but also for sustainable return of Afghan refugees.

We welcome the progress made in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. The peace agreement signed, and intra-Afghan dialogue would create space and conditions conducive to the return and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

We have always urged for timely and targeted investments inside Afghanistan, especially in priority areas of high return.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity is a useful forum of bilateral engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan with regard to Afghan Refugees' return and resettlement plans inside

Afghanistan. In the backdrop of peace and development efforts in Afghanistan, we, through regular meetings with Govt. of Afghanistan are discussing and working on repatriation and return of all Afghans through a joint plan with time lines and targets.

**Mr. Chairman,**

As co-convenor of the first Global Refugee Forum, we remain committed to the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. We welcome the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and urge to honour the pledges for refugees and their host countries.

We value UNHCR efforts to broaden the support base for refugees and to reach out to new partner states and institutions. It is essential that these efforts are supported through humanitarian funding. Similarly, UNHCR while devising its global operations policy should be sensitive to the regional and local requirements of refugee hosting countries for implementation of those policies as per the local dynamics.

The development financing instruments need to be re-designed and implemented in ways that do not worsen existing high debt burdens of refugee hosting countries and erode the true essence of the principle of equitable burden and responsibility sharing.

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

**I thank you**