

## **Preparatory Meeting for the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly**

### **Addressing the Issues of Large Movements of Refugees**

I would like to start by thanking Their Excellencies Dina Kavar and David Donoghue for the Zero Draft Declaration and the Global Compact on Sharing Responsibility for Refugees documents that will form the basis of our preparations for the upcoming High-Level Meeting on September 19.

Both these documents constitute a valuable resource for the recommendations we will be making and the commitments we will hold on to as we seek to address the issues related to the root causes of large movements of refugees.

As I am sure you are all aware that addressing this issue requires cooperation and collaboration, and the joint efforts of a large spectrum of organizations, institutions, agencies and governments.

Obviously, the best and most effective way of addressing the root causes is by ending wars, armed conflicts and violence. It also requires concerted efforts of providing political and social stability, ensuring that populations enjoy safety, security, and have access to basic needs, as well as upholding humanitarian and human rights laws.

Thus far, the intentions are clear and sincere; however, what has been lacking has been the political will at every level. And therefore, we find ourselves having to work on addressing the results and responding to the needs due to the lack of solutions at the highest political levels.

Both the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the resolutions of the World Humanitarian Summit have provided us with the guidelines.

We do know what needs to be done:

We are faced with catastrophic waves of fleeing populations moving from country to country, region to region and crossing continents in search of safety, security, basic needs, and human dignity.

Can we stop this movement? Can we stem the flow at the source?

I am sure the answer is obvious to all of us who are concerned with the humanitarian and developmental side of the issue, our influence does not extend to the global political issues that are the root cause of this human tragedy.

Therefore, where does our shared responsibility lie?

I will speak from personal experience having visited refugee camps. Tragically, we are no longer dealing with providing safe havens for civilians fleeing from war and persecution in one country and providing for their needs in refuge—as was the case in the last century.

We are now dealing populations seeking refuges in countries that can no longer sustain such a human influx economically, exacerbated by complex political, religious and sectarian

As a representative of LAS for humanitarian and relief issues and at the same time a liaison between LAS and local and international relief organizations and agencies, I find myself in the difficult position of having to deal with three distinct but related concerns:

- the extreme need for humanitarian and development aid to preserve and protect the human rights of refugee populations in the host countries
- the complexity of the social, economic and political situation in the region
- the tensions created in host countries that threaten stability, and often result in additional violence and armed conflict.

Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen, Colleagues,

Sadly, we are faced with an emergency that is at least five years old. As international aid, human rights, development and relief organizations and bodies we uphold the Convention on the Status of Refugees and are committed the articles of the Human Rights Declaration, as well as other instruments that safeguard human life and security.

However, as I visit one refugee camp after the other and speak to the families who feel they are trapped in a limbo of deepening poverty and neglect, I sense their lack of confidence in us and their growing frustration.

This is one of the main reason we have been witnessing wave after wave of refugees risking their lives and their safety in order to move to what they perceive as countries of opportunity.

In the beginning, most of these refugees fled to neighbouring countries not only because it was the closer and most convenient option, but also because they had hope for a quick and eventual return to their homes and their communities.

This hope is dwindling as the political situation becomes more complex and more dangerous.

And we as well are beginning to see that the longer this goes on, the greater the threat to global peace and security. Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan as well as these host countries themselves are suffering the political and economic instability are now dealing with the additional consequences of the large movement of refugee populations.

So action is urgent.

From my own perspective and my experience, I believe the better the living conditions and services provided to the refugees, the greater the chances that they will remain in the

neighbouring host countries. Also, the greater the support we are able to provide the host countries, the less possibility of growing tensions and violent eruptions.

In a meeting in Lebanon a few months ago, the Minister of Education responded to a question about why strain the Lebanese educational system when the refugees will be leaving eventually. He responded that we must insist on education for all refugee children of all ages precisely because they will be going back to a war-torn country that will need as many skilled and educated people to help rebuild it.

This applies to all aspects of the refugee life.

It also places upon us the shared responsibility to support the host countries and strengthen their national infrastructure to be able to withstand the added social, economic and political burden they must carry.

This represent is not only a humanitarian challenge, it is also a moral responsibility to our world and to future generations.

We owe the children being born and growing up in a situation of refuge, to ensure that they are psychologically and physically healthy to face the future.

Of course to the best of our abilities, we have been doing that. But the crisis is large and at times overwhelming. And sometimes it seems to me that the entire world is traumatized by it not only the countries producing and the countries receiving refugees.

Maybe all of us here were part of the two large international conference that took place over the past 12 months, and which aimed at addressing the issues of development, rights and humanitarian assistance.

From hereinafter we should keep those at the forefront of our work:

I believe one our best guiding principles in dealing with it is the application and implementation of the commitments we made to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. If we work systematically, sharing the responsibilities, collaborating on finding solutions and cooperating on delivery of programmes and projects that will meet those goals—then, I believe we have a chance to heal the collective trauma.

Moreover, in doing so, we have a greater chance of preventing the recurrence of the kinds of circumstances that result in violence and conflict.

I hope that at the High-level meeting in September we will also look at practical and collaborative ways to addressing the commitments that were made.

These include: dealing with immediate and urgent humanitarian needs; reduce vulnerability and improve the resilience of refugees and internally displaced persons; provide host countries and communities with increased support to strengthen their ability to cope; and activate an international framework and plan of action for equitable responsibility-sharing and burden-sharing to deal with the large movements we are facing.

We also need to look at those populations that are particularly vulnerable. In addition to women, infants and children; people with disabilities, the elderly and those suffering severe psychological trauma, require specific and specialized attention and services.

In host countries that lack the infrastructure and expertise to deal with such cases, the most vulnerable and most in need often become the most neglected.

These are some of the issues of great concern for me and that I have witnessed repeatedly when visiting refugee camps and meeting with government and aid officials in host countries.

It is my greatest hope that we can address them from a sustainable, developmental, human rights perspective, aimed at securing long-term solutions, and in the collaborative, responsibility-sharing manner we are all hoping to achieve.

Thank you all and I wish us all the best of luck for the sake of our world.