

Speech: “We meet today at a crucial time for global displacement with the number of people forcibly displaced at an all time high since the Second World War”

Thank you Mr President, and at the outset, all the very best for your month as Presidency. I also want to thank High Commissioner Grandi for his compelling but concerning remarks this morning.

We meet today at a crucial time for global displacement, with the number of people forcibly displaced at an all time high since the Second World War. And sadly, the trajectory is only upwards.

Today, I want to share the story of just one of the 65 million people currently displaced around the world. It’s the story of a mother from Rakhine State, faced with the hardest decision of her life: to flee into the unknown or face the violence engulfing the that province she calls home.

“We were happy,” she told a journalist last month. “Now, we are in this chaos. They are killing and burning houses; people are unable to stay.”

Faced with such brutality, she had no choice but to flee with her husband and children, risking the journey to Cox’s Bazaar.

“When we got in the boat,” she said, “we were scared as water was getting in. I was scared that it would sink; people were crying.”

Her husband went missing as they fled, and she said, “I don’t know if he is dead or alive.”

Together with her children, she eventually reached safety – and I pay tribute to Bangladesh for the humanitarian assistance provided to her and to so many others.

But that family’s story has been repeated and repeated and repeated over the past months. Only two days ago, a boat carrying refugees to Bangladesh capsized, claiming the lives of at least four people. And it’s a story that will only keep being told until the conflict pushing them away is fundamentally addressed and they are allowed to return home.

As Filippo rightly said, whether in Burma, in Syria, or anywhere else in the world, this Council has a unique role to play in maintaining the peace and security that would have stopped that family and so many others like them from having to flee their home. And we have a special responsibility also to hold to account those who do not respect international humanitarian law, refugee law and those who fuel displacement.

Simply put, the stark number of people in need today tells us that what we're doing is not working. Refugees are spending longer and longer displaced, often in poverty with a dwindling hope of return. A new global approach is now needed to tackle protracted crises and a more comprehensive response is required to help the growing number of people currently displaced.

That's why the UK strongly supports the aims of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. It focuses on long-term, sustainable solutions. These help build the self-reliance of refugees and ease pressure on countries like Kenya, Uganda or Lebanon that have generously welcomed and hosted so many.

This Framework means delivering jobs, education, better services to refugees and host communities, while also better co-ordinating the international response. The UK actively supports this approach where the new Refugee Response Framework is being rolled out.

We're also already delivering the sort of long-term response to refugees' needs that the Framework recommends – including through job compacts to provide tens of thousands of refugees with the opportunity to work in countries such as Jordan or Ethiopia, as well as innovative education programmes and support to host communities and refugees alike.

To make these approaches work, UNHCR has a vital role to play in dialogue with governments, partnerships with other actors, and giving advice and support where needed. In Jordan, we welcome the cash assistance that they are giving to refugees to meet basic food needs. In Turkey, we support the assistance they are providing to refugees to prepare for the oncoming winter. And in the response to the crisis in Burma, they also have a role to play in the returns process in cooperation with the Bangladeshi authorities.

But to deliver all this and more, it is clear that UNHCR, like all the other parts of the UN, will have to reform, and I welcome High Commissioner Grandi's commitment to this. UNHCR has a central role, working with other agencies, in reforming the humanitarian system. It's important that UNHCR continues to work better and more collaboratively with partners on the ground, including with development actors. We want to see improved transparency, increased accountability to beneficiaries, more multi-year programming, and a continued scale up in the use of cash.

Because, Mr President, in the face of an unprecedented need, it's clear that we cannot just do business as usual. We need a new approach, and we look forward to working with colleagues from the Security Council, from UNHCR, and elsewhere to achieve that new approach.

Thank you.