

UK statement to the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees High Level Meeting

High Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Let me start by welcoming the Support Platforms launched at the Global Refugee Forum, including the regional platforms for Afghan Refugees. We are interested in the Core Group of States, and wish to hear further about the role they will play and the proposed timeline. We are willing to offer our political and facilitation support.

We note that the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees will support the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, which must be done in conditions of dignity and safety. It is essential that any process outlines the favourable conditions for returns, including economic opportunity, security, and access to health and education, and assesses that these have been met. The challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation for Afghan refugees and host communities alike.

The UK is committed to supporting the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan. We welcome the work that UNHCR is doing in those countries to support host governments and continue to provide substantial support through IOM, to offer registration and assistance for the most vulnerable portion of those returning from Iran and Pakistan. The UK is one of the only countries providing resettlement opportunities to Afghan migrants from Iran this year, hoping to resettle up to 100 refugees.

We welcome the essential work that UNHCR and international non-governmental organisations, including Relief International and the Norwegian Refugee Council, are doing with the Iranian authorities to ensure the resilience of vulnerable Afghan communities. We appreciate the support that the Government of Iran provides to its Afghan community, and are open to exploring opportunities for assistance.

We recognise the willingness of the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan to co-operate on the orderly, voluntary and principled return of Afghan refugees for whom repatriation to Afghanistan is a viable option. In line with the aims of the regional platform, UK assistance to Pakistan is helping deliver education to host and refugee children alike.

The UK has invested in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, working with host and migrant populations to ensure that all children can be immunised. We harmonised this with our polio programme in Afghanistan to ensure that all children in both countries, and those moving between them, are immunised. We also sought to establish vaccination sites in areas that migrant Afghans are known to travel through. Our polio campaigns have been paused due to COVID-19, but we hope they will be resumed shortly.

The UK remains strongly committed to Afghanistan, providing £210 million in humanitarian assistance over a five year period to 2024. In the long-term, this will help to establish conducive conditions for returns by supporting resilience for returnees and displaced people at the community level, as well as targeting those areas of the country with the greatest potential for high numbers of returns from Iran and Pakistan.

Thank you.