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Statement to the United Nations Summit on Refugees and Migrants

High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Distinguished Presidents
Secretary-General,
Excellencies,

This should not be a comfortable summit.

While the leadership of the Secretary-General, and his fine report, should be acknowledged by all -- as well as the admirable efforts by Ireland and Jordan to achieve political consensus - this summit cannot be reduced to speeches and feel-good interviews, a dash of self-congratulation and we move on.

When millions of people see freedom's invitation only through the flapping canvas of a tent. When they carry their children and possession on their backs, walking hundreds, perhaps thousands of miles. When they and their families risk drowning, and are kept cramped in appalling detention centres and, once released, risk abuse by racists and xenophobes. There is no cause for comfort here.

The bitter truth is, this summit was called because we have been largely failing. Failing the long-suffering people of Syria, in not ending the war in its infancy. Failing others in now chronic conflict zones, for the same reason. Failing millions of migrants who deserve far more than lives marked by cradle-to-grave indignity and desperation.

It is shameful the victims of abominable crimes should be made to suffer further by our failures to give them protection. It is abhorrent that desperate women, men and children can be branded as criminals, and detained for months, even years, incurring further damage to their physical and mental health.

We can change this. Here at the summit. Together -- respect, safety and dignity for all. But not when the defenders of what is right and good are being outflanked in too many countries by race-baiting bigots, who seek to gain, or retain, power by wielding prejudice and deceit, at the expense of those most vulnerable and, ultimately, even those who support them initially.

An epidemic of amnesia is at the heart of this moral collapse in some quarters. Many seem to have forgotten the two world wars. What happens when fear and anger are stoked by half-truths and outright lies? A density of hatred builds up. The pin is pulled. The timer, released. And humanity's rendezvous with the "demon of world history" beckons again.

The bigots and deceivers, in opposing greater responsibility-sharing, promote rupture. Some of them may well be in this hall this morning. If you are here, we say to you: we will continue to name you publicly. You may soon walk away from this hall, but not from the broader judgement of "we the people", all the world's people, not from us.
