

## **Summary of Remarks by Mr. Richard Towle, Deputy Director UNHCR Office in New York**

As we look at the challenges faced through the strong headwinds of climate change as well as the food, energy and security crises exacerbated by supply chains from the Ukraine and the Russian conflict, the situation for already marginalized and vulnerable people has become considerably worse.

First of all, we are facing a perfect storm of elements that are conspiring to create even more human and security than there was before the Ukraine crisis erupted. This is sapping human capital and draining human dignity.

For refugees already facing the prospect of months, sometimes years from their lands and homes, the erosion of their empowerment and the erosion of their rights and entitlements is profoundly disempowering for them as people, and as communities.

Our High Commissioner issued a very stark warning yesterday indicating that for the first time ever the numbers of force displaced people around the planet has exceeded 100 million people.

That's one out of every 100 people around the world faces severe dislocation and displacement, and of course, the African continent has been more severely damaged, and hurt, by the phenomenon of displacement than most other parts of the world.

80% of that population are women and children already facing vulnerabilities, and these vulnerabilities of displacement are exacerbated, and 90% of those populations that are displaced are living in countries and societies that are already challenged from socioeconomic shortages and difficulties of their own, often living on border areas, and marginalized from the mainstream of societies, and one only has to look at the extraordinary figures of vulnerability in the horn of Africa.

Today the droughts that haven't been seen on a scale in 40 years displace more than 20 million people in extreme food and security context.

The first point I would like to emphasize is that we need people-centric and participatory approaches. We can no longer afford to design programs to raise funds and have frameworks that do not place people, ordinary people at the center of everything that we do. This lies at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals, because the mantra there is, leave no one behind.

If we are truly to raise the human and social and economic and political capital of countries, we must make sure that all groups are brought up at the same time. The rising tide must raise all boats, not just those who are already privileged in many senses.

So, in all of our efforts of designing collaborative frameworks at a global or regional subregional level, they must place participation of everybody at the heart of it, and particularly women.

The voices of women in active participation, not in lip service terms, so that they can shape their destinies and directions of strategies and plans. It is extremely important to harness the power that they will always bring to these kinds of endeavors.

The second point is to make sure that displaced people are also brought into that. We cannot afford to have 100 million people around the planet cast to the margins of society.

This is extremely corrosive to their own sense of community survival, but it is also extremely corrosive and damaging to state and national security.

Large numbers of human insecure people on border areas and within societies destabilizes societies.

These are problems that we can no longer afford to ignore. Social protection, health, education, work are meaningful for livelihoods.

It is very important that displaced people are brought into participation and included in whatever national or other endeavors being undertaken.

And last but not least, the tapping into the community strength. The answers of resilience lie in the communities themselves.

Too often in the past we've designed programs. We've raised funds that take for granted that beneficiaries know and should be grateful for what is being received.

We need to hire the human capital that resides in the communities to make sure that they are the destined master of their own destiny, and that their capital is released in its own small way. UNHCR is trying to address these things.

For example, in Cameroon and Ethiopia we've got some very active reforestation programs.

We're investing in solar energy, precisely at the community level to uplift human capital by providing income generation, and also to hold and bring communities together so that they have a meaningful sense of social cohesion within their communities.

Without that they can become prey to other disintegrating forces, and can become exploited by others, including the rise of extremism in parts of the world which is deeply disturbing.

The challenge is ahead of us. Integration and participation must remain at the center of everything that we do, and we hope that we count on the support of these tremendously vital regional institutions to provide leadership on how to make sure that the world's most disadvantaged to disenfranchise people remain at the center and deeply included in our endeavors.

