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An ECOSOC Special Meeting on

"Sustainable urbanisation and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda"

21 April 2022, 16h00-19h00 CEST (10–13:00 NY Time)

Statement Ms. Gillian Triggs, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection

'Roundtable 2: UN Systemwide Strategy for Sustainable Urbanization to assist Member States in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda'

Thank you very much, Madam Chair, Colleagues and Ladies and Gentlemen.

Most of the world's refugees and internally displaced people have settled in towns and cities. They now number over 80 million people.

UNHCR has a mandate to ensure the international protection of all those forcibly displaced.

Forced displacement to urban areas changes how UNHCR delivers protection and durable solutions for. We must now adjust how we work with new partners such as mayors and local authorities who now carry the burden of ensuring the inclusion of refugees in local services.

Cities and local governments are at the forefront of decision-making and are most likely to have daily contact with refugees, impacting their lives as they seek employment, settle children in school and access medical care.

Inclusion is a key strategic direction for UNHCR and the New Urban Agenda supports this strategy by adopting two major principles

1. That there must be equal access for all to essential services and;
2. Refugees should be included in urban planning, budgeting, and programmes.

The New Urban Agenda also recognizes the important point that host communities need more support in supporting refugees through advocacy and funding.

The United Nations has, as you will all know, made a commitment to "leaving no one behind", a commitment that explicitly includes refugees and it's interesting to note that a new indicator on refugees, has now been recognized by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020.

The New Urban Agenda sends an important message that refugees and displaced people are not forgotten, they are to be included, and will not be left behind. It offers a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future.

Refugees - like so many others - are drawn to cities by their opportunities. Refugees have skills, talents, and aspirations and come to cities to move freely without fear, to live in proper housing, to get decent work, to educate their children, and see a doctor when they are unwell. The New Urban Agenda's area-based approach speaks to each of these essential and very human goals.

Cities also enable refugees to be a part of the local community. Sadly, in practice, many refugees live in marginalised areas without access to housing, infrastructure, or services. They often join the urban poor and share many of the same challenges. As refugees they face additional challenges, they face language and culture barriers, discrimination, xenophobia, and social exclusion. Refugees often lack legal status or ID documents, forcing them to live "below the radar" to avoid authorities. Working for

a displaced person typically means working in the informal economy. Parents may send their children out to work rather than to school to make ends meet, and these children in turn become vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

There is an urgent need for Mayors, city administrations and local leaders to respond to these needs in pragmatic and innovative ways. At UNHCR we have seen their commitment in practice to promoting fair access to shared services and economic inclusion.

Important guidance for UNHCR is the Global Compact on Refugees recognises the vital role of cities, and in turn, cities demonstrated their commitment at the first Refugee Forum held in December 2019

Concrete pledges to address social cohesion and improve access to services have been made by the cities of Bristol, United Kingdom; Milan, Italy; Durban, South Africa; and São Paulo, Brazil and a joint pledge has been made by the Union of Municipalities of Turkey. Arua and Koboko, Uganda; Kakuma, Kenya and Gabley, Somalia, have all joined cities pledging to implement the Global Compact on Refugees by making new pledges in 2021. We now have fruitful partnerships with City Networks such as United Cities and Local Governments, Mayor's Migration Council, the Mayor's Mechanism and Cities Alliance.

There are many examples of what we can do in practice:

We can expand cash transfers for humanitarian assistance within cities that also benefit the local economy.

We can increase investment in urban services such as schools that can create greater access and better facilities for national and refugee children and contribute to social cohesion.

The UN and our NGO partners can expand national social protection by joint work for example joint work on housing, land and property rights that are important access to stable housing.

Increasing financial support to city authorities and urban communities to provide access by refugees to entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. And we can do this by providing better information to refugees about how to set up businesses. Financial institutions and local authorities can work together to address legal barriers to entrepreneurial opportunities.

In summary, there is a strong coherence of UNHCR's strategic policy with both the Global Compact on Refugees and the now the New Urban Agenda. Each is inspired by and reinforces the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the core UN commitment to "leave no one behind."

Thank you very much