

**Statement by Filippo Grandi,
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**World Food Programme
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Mr. President,
Executive Director,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me. Of all organizations with which UNHCR works, I cannot think of one closer to us than the World Food Programme. We share values, interests, challenges and approaches. As a long time humanitarian worker, I feel strongly about this. Our partnership is at the heart of humanitarian action and through it is channeled a very substantive share of humanitarian assistance. There is a strong coincidence between UNHCR's responsibilities for protecting and finding solutions for refugees, internally displaced and stateless people, and WFP's goal of tackling hunger - now clearly articulated in your new Strategic Plan.

We also share an extensive field presence, often in insecure places, a commitment to placing people at the centre of our work, and a strong focus on emergency response. We both operate at the intersection of humanitarian and development action and understand how important it is to overcome the divide between those spheres in order to address and find solutions to the drivers of hunger and displacement. It is important that you - WFP's stakeholders - are aware of and support this key partnership, characterized by constant cooperation, sometimes healthy emulation of each other's strengths and identity of views.

Displacement is occurring in an extremely complex and dynamic environment. This requires, increasingly, agile responses, flexible funding support, and a renewed push for solutions. Today's conflicts are complicated, fractured and prolonged - with multiple parties and shifting alliances, strong elements of criminality and violent extremism, and - often - international involvement. Efforts to prevent conflict, and to secure and build peace have not been very successful in recent years. And as I saw in a field visit to the Lake Chad region in December, food insecurity, environmental degradation and development challenges often intersect with conflict in driving new

displacement and impeding solutions for those already displaced. All these elements have resulted in record numbers of refugees and internally displaced people, now exceeding 65 million worldwide and often living in prolonged exile.

Yet, the dynamics are constantly shifting, calling for a degree of flexibility as potential openings arise even as emergencies continue. In long-standing conflict situations, including Somalia and Afghanistan, we must reinvigorate efforts to find solutions for displaced people where we can, even where a definitive resolution of conflict remains elusive. In Iraq, 161,000 people have now been newly displaced as a result of the current offensive in the Mosul area, but IDPs are also returning to areas south of the city and elsewhere.

In the Lake Chad region, security operations are likely to create more space for engagement on protection and support for potential solutions, including return, in north-east Nigeria and elsewhere. As security is further restored, we need to be ready to scale up rapidly to reach people in need in newly accessible areas - and development support is also needed to improve conditions for both host communities and the displaced.

I visited Syria just two weeks ago, where I was profoundly affected by the grave destruction in Aleppo and Homs - with endless shells of buildings and an eerie sense of desolation. The people living there and the few who have already returned - mainly those who did not move far away - have very urgent needs. As this crisis enters its seventh year, rather than debating safe zones or other concepts unlikely to be conducive to improved access to civilians, the international community must stay focused on the process recently initiated in Astana and - after years of failure - find the unity needed to bring negotiations to a conclusion accepted by all. This - together with large-scale investment in reconstruction - is the only way to bring stability to the country and eventually enable for voluntary and sustainable returns. But the situation on the ground remains volatile. Depending on how the political situation evolves, in fact, we may also witness further displacement and even if there are positive developments, some elements of the conflict are likely to remain unresolved for a longer period. We must therefore be ready to respond to changing dynamics, equipped with resources that are sufficiently flexible to allow us to do so.

The experiences of the last few years - and in particular the impact of the Syria crisis - have led to an important recognition of forced displacement as a development challenge. With 90% of refugees located in developing and middle income countries next to conflict zones, the presence of large numbers of refugees, often affected by extreme poverty, has a significant socio-

economic impact, as well as affecting development prospects in the communities hosting them.

This recognition is triggering a shift to new approaches focused on refugee inclusion in national systems and services, self-reliance and access to education, skill development and economic opportunities, and on supporting host community capacities. This should form part of a broader effort to reduce poverty and boost shared prosperity, and is distinct from - but should complement - humanitarian action. The World Bank has played a particularly significant role in leveraging this shift, building on promising experiences in the Middle East, and most recently through the establishment of a USD 2 billion IDA sub-window for refugee hosting countries and a USD 14 billion allocation for fragile, conflict and violence-affected states.

More broadly, there is a paramount need for strong support to help stabilise refugees in countries where they have sought refuge and allow them to rebuild their lives - including equipping them with the skills and resources that would support their eventual return, and countering the factors that may otherwise propel them into dangerous onward journeys to industrialised states. There are positive examples to build on - including in Uganda, where refugees have access to land, and self-reliance is promoted and supported from the outset; or in Iran, where refugees are now included in the public health insurance system and both documented and undocumented Afghan children have access to Iranian schools on the same basis as local children.

But generally speaking, refugee protection is increasingly under pressure. The tradition of providing refuge to people seeking safety is a long-standing one that cuts across religious and cultural traditions, and is embedded in international law, but is currently being called into question in a way that is deeply worrying.

The events of 2015, when over a million people arrived in Europe, marked a critical turning point. Despite early measures aimed at forging a collective European position based on solidarity and protection principles, the response soon fragmented, borders were closed, and a small number of states ended up assuming a disproportionate responsibility. The EU-Turkey statement issued in March last year helped stem the flow of arrivals from the Eastern Mediterranean route, and provided for major and much-needed investment to support refugees in Turkey, but also set a precedent that appears to link funding to management of onward movement.

In other industrialised countries, measures aimed at containing refugees in regions of origin, language that links refugees with security threats and terrorism, and efforts to block access to asylum are also sending worrying

signals to major refugee-hosting countries - some of whom are in turn restricting access to safety, applying pressure for premature returns and reducing the quality and stability of asylum.

Yet, there are positive signs as well. The UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants held last September, and the New York Declaration that resulted, marked a significant political commitment to shared responsibility for refugees and solidarity with both refugees and refugee-hosting countries - recognising that these are essential foundations on which international refugee protection rests. The Leaders' Summit hosted the following day by the United States together with a number of other countries also made immediate strides in translating the aspirations of the Declaration into firm, measurable commitments. It is vitally important that the Declaration is now translated into concrete action, and the momentum sustained; and I will mention in a few minutes how cooperation between WFP and UNHCR is relevant to this effort.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What are the implications of this global picture for WFP's work? How does the collaboration between our two organisations fit within this broader context?

First of all, WFP's consistent, predictable engagement in addressing the food assistance needs of refugees and the communities hosting them is critical to the lives, health and nutrition status and well being of millions of refugees worldwide - including in sub-Saharan Africa where almost 3.5 million refugees in 20 countries received food assistance last year.

The first key area in which our collaboration remains essential is therefore in ensuring food security for refugees. Regrettably, and echoing points made by the Executive Director, I have to report that we have growing food shortages in several critical operations. While Europe and much of the "global North" worry about an increasing number of people on the move, funding challenges - with which you are surely familiar - are resulting in cuts of up to 50% in food rations in large operations in Africa including Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, South Sudan and Uganda, and other operations also affected by pipeline breaks. This results in a very precarious food security situation for refugees in these operations. In addition, due to drought, on-going conflict and political instability, the situation in the Horn of Africa as a whole is of great concern, as the Executive Director highlighted. New refugee influxes from South Sudan and Somalia to neighbouring countries are particularly worrying. These refugees, having travelled far with limited resources, are arriving in host countries with high levels of acute malnutrition, yet with limited food rations. It is difficult to predict how - if at all - secondary movements of refugees, including in some cases towards Europe, will be avoided if this

crisis is not urgently addressed. In any case, we are fully committed to continuing working with WFP to avert the consequences of the situation including through joint advocacy efforts.

Given this situation, we recognise the importance of ensuring that the resources available go to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. I fully support the work that our colleagues have been undertaking on developing joint approaches to targeting food assistance, including through the involvement of refugees and other relevant stakeholders in the process, through joint assessment and analysis, and the determination of eligibility criteria for targeted food assistance.

A key area in which we have been working closely in recent months is the use of cash as an instrument of assistance. Cash plays an important protection role, enhances dignity and provides a bridge to self-reliance and inclusion in local and national economies and services. For this reason, I am pleased that we have been working with WFP - a major cash player, as explained by the Executive Director - on developing a collaborative, complementary and inclusive approach for cash, including multi-purpose grants. The discussion is technically complex but I hope that we will soon conclude an addendum to our current Memorandum of Understanding which will provide a platform for collaboration - by defining core principles, a common cash approach at country level using shared delivery arrangements wherever feasible, and a global common cash support mechanism.

A closer approach between WFP and UNHCR in cash-based interventions will also enable the engagement and participation of other UN organisations and NGOs, development actors, private sector service providers and cash programming networks and alliances. I ask that our donor partners respond positively to our efforts to establish these common approaches, and provide funding that strengthens them while reinforcing respective expertise, objectives and comparative advantages.

Another key area of cooperation relates to refugee data. We strongly support the sharing of relevant data to facilitate assessment, response analysis, and provision of assistance to refugees, recognizing the principles of specificity of purpose, and proportionality, and in the interests of the protection of refugees. In this respect we are also committed to developing an addendum to our Memorandum of Understanding related to data sharing.

A further area of technical collaboration between WFP and UNHCR relates to self-reliance - an especially important one given the protracted nature of many refugee situations, and our commitment to the early inclusion of refugees in local and national economies and systems. Refugees are people with

marketable skills and abilities, and a strong motivation to build their own livelihoods - but it is governments that play the critical role in creating an enabling environment, by allowing freedom of movement and the right to work, giving access to markets and public services, and ensuring financial inclusion through access to banking, savings, loans and micro-insurance. This can be politically challenging, and it is therefore important that we continue to build the evidence base to demonstrate that allowing refugees to participate in the economy benefits both refugees and their hosts. For this reason we have agreed to renew our efforts in this important area, through the Joint WFP-UNHCR Strategy on Self-Reliance launched at the UN Summit in September.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to take this opportunity to commend WFP for the excellent work done in establishing its new strategic plan, centred on the pursuit of SDGs 2 and 17; and to highlight its many synergies with the principles and approaches set out in the New York Declaration which I mentioned earlier. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework annexed to the Declaration, which UNHCR has been tasked to apply, in close coordination with states, UN agencies and other stakeholders, is the primary mechanism for translating this into action, and will inform a Global Compact on Refugees to be adopted by states in 2018. The objectives of this framework are to ease pressure on refugee host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand third country solutions like resettlement, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. Unlike traditional refugee responses, the framework is designed to engage a much wider array of stakeholders, including bilateral and multilateral development actors and institutions, and has a strong focus on situating support to refugees and host communities within national development strategies - drawing on the 'leave no one behind' principle at the heart of the 2030 Agenda.

Let me emphasize that WFP has a key role to play in this shift to new ways of addressing forced displacement - in tackling the factors linked to food insecurity and competition over scarce resources that drive and exacerbate the consequences of conflict and displacement, in continuing to play a lead role in emergency response to displacement crises, and in helping to insert a solutions orientation in the response to refugee crises from the outset, drawing on its expertise in operating at the intersection of humanitarian and development action. I want to emphasise, therefore, that WFP is a crucial partner in the development of a Global Compact on Refugees.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I close, there is one important duty which I must carry out: I want to express my personal and very sincere thanks to the Executive Director, as she prepares to end her tenure at WFP. We at UNHCR have greatly benefited from her commitment to steering and deepening the crucial collaboration between our two organisations; and I am personally grateful to Ertharin for her support and counsel during my first year in office, which I will miss; and for her friendship of many years, which I trust will continue.

Ertharin Cousin will leave behind a vigorous and respected WFP - an organization with a strong sense of purpose and vision, which we are proud to consider our closest partner in the United Nations. We look forward to continuing to cooperate with our many mutual government and non-governmental interlocutors; with WFP colleagues here in Rome and in countless field locations; and of course with Ertharin's successor, in the same spirit of frankness, collaboration, and mutual respect which she has constantly and effectively promoted as we worked together - in field locations, in bilateral discussions and in the UN - in addressing many difficult challenges.

We wish you happiness and success, Ertharin, in your future endeavours.

Thank you.