



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

*As delivered*

## **Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation – Supporting Stability in the Region**

### **Remarks by António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**Berlin, 28 October 2014**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Germany for this extremely important initiative, and I am honored that the Secretary-General has asked me to represent him at this meeting.

The Syrian situation is the most dramatic humanitarian crisis the world has faced in a very long time. Syrians are now the largest refugee population under UNHCR's mandate. The consequences of this massive outflow for the neighbouring countries – Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt – are enormous. Economies, public services, the social fabric of communities and the welfare of families are all heavily affected, not to mention the security impact of the Syria conflict in the whole region.

The contribution of the host countries in protecting refugees is so fundamental that it makes them by far the largest humanitarian donors in the Syrian context. And yet, while international support to match their efforts has been remarkable, it is clearly not in proportion with the immense needs created by this crisis.

Iraq, in addition to hosting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, has now been entirely engulfed by the conflict, with massive internal displacement, to the extent that we can now speak about a Syria-Iraq crisis. Lebanon and Jordan have witnessed a dramatic increase in population, which has overwhelmed national infrastructure, schools and hospitals; strained water and energy supplies; exerted a heavy toll on public finance and created economic hardship for many among the host population. Ordinary Lebanese and Jordanians have

difficulties to find jobs, and increasingly struggle to feed their families as salaries shrink and prices and rents are on the rise. The Turkish government has already spent more than 4 billion dollars of its budget in direct refugee assistance, and one can now see Syrians everywhere across the country. Even in Egypt, the impact of the refugee presence is far from being negligible.

The situation is becoming more and more difficult for the host countries, and a radical qualitative and quantitative change is needed in the response from the international community. At a time when we are facing a high risk of a deterioration in the protection space for Syrian refugees in the region, massive and concrete support must be provided to Syria's neighbours so as to prevent a humanitarian disaster.

First of all, there is a need for much stronger commitment to burden-sharing by other countries, allowing Syrian refugees to find protection beyond the immediate neighbouring region. This can be done through resettlement, humanitarian admission schemes, simplified family reunification or more flexible visa regulations. UNHCR will host a ministerial pledging conference for resettlement and admission places for Syrian refugees in early December, and I hope that this will generate significant additional support.

But even more importantly, we must stop seeing the Syria situation as merely a humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian response alone is utterly insufficient. We must establish a solid link between the humanitarian, resilience and development dimensions. The host countries need and deserve much stronger financial support to their budgets, to allow them to address the structural gaps in education and health care systems, put in place adequate infrastructure, and build longer-term community resilience in areas most impacted by the refugee presence. This is the integrated vision we have been developing in close cooperation with UNDP and the World Bank and which underpins both the national plans and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan to be launched here in Berlin in December.

But so far, development funds have been slow to arrive, and there is no way humanitarian funding can address all of these challenges. We need a real cultural change to bridge the relief-development gap that exists in the way governments, agencies and international financial institutions plan and deliver. I appeal to you all to ensure the necessary political leadership, because it is not with a bureaucratic approach that we are going to turn things around and to do the necessary realignment of priorities in development cooperation policies. It is obvious for me that countries like Lebanon and Jordan must be the first priority of any development cooperation policy in the present times.

Addressing these massive needs is not only a matter of solidarity, but also one of everyone's vital interest in stability and security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I was a student, the wars I read about in history books always had a winner and a loser. But no one is winning the wars of today; everyone is losing. Conflicts just go on – some forever, others until they end in a compromise that could just as well have been achieved at the beginning, without the fighting.

We all know that these crises have no humanitarian solution, but it is more and more evident that they have no military solution either. I hope that, sooner rather than later, all those who have direct or indirect influence in the Syria crisis, understand that indeed they are all losing. It is time for political leaders to come together, forget their differences and put an end to this senseless violence. Only then will we have the political solution that we all need, the refugees more than anyone else. And we hope for a voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity to put an end to their plight.

Thank you very much.