

**High Level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC - General Debate
17-20 July 2023**

Madame President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A core principle of the 2030 Agenda is “Leave No One Behind”; a commitment to make a concerted effort to identify and lift up the most vulnerable that societies so often miss, and a *conditio sine qua non* for the 2030 Agenda’s full implementation. Refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons are among those furthest behind. And their numbers are increasing.

At the end of 2022, over **108 million people were forcibly displaced**. The number of **refugees** increased from **27.1 million in 2021 to 35.3 million at the end of 2022**, the largest annual increase ever recorded. **More than 1 in every 74 people on Earth** has been forced to flee.

While conflict is the primary cause for displacement, the climate emergency is also a key factor. As resources become scarce, competition grows and this can lead to conflict. Violence, for example, erupted in northern Cameroon between herders and farmers who were forced to share ever-evaporating water sources, displacing thousands.

Madame Chair,

Most refugees want nothing more than to go back home. We must work together to create the conditions for people to return in safety and dignity. Unfortunately, lack of services in countries of origin often inhibits this solution to displacement. Think of South Sudan for example, where a fledgling peace agreement has enabled over 600,000 to return home. Yet, how sustainable can that return be if there are no services, or even water to drink, wash, or cook with?

The SDGs cannot be achieved unless refugees are included. Inclusion of refugees – in societies, services, and the economy – can be obtained or facilitated by development planning as Kenya has demonstrated by rolling out policies allowing refugees to work, go to school and access housing and health care.

Refugees are already contributing to the realization of the SDGs for all - as educators, entrepreneurs, climate activists and health care workers, among others. Since they are among those most adversely affected by the world’s challenges, they are also best placed to discover and implement solutions and must be further supported. But hosting countries cannot do it all alone. The international community must step up and provide the financial support needed to implement inclusive policies and plans.

2023 is a moment of truth for global displacement and for the SDGs. The SDG Summit in September and the Global Refugee Forum in December will provide key opportunities to turn



the tide and steer the SDG's course towards the right direction, through shared responsibility for the protection, wellbeing and inclusion of all.

Thank you.