

Statement by H.E. Mr. Naseer Ahmad FAIQ
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United Nations General Assembly, Third Committee

Agenda Item 60: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian
questions

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Thank you, Madam Chair,

The prolonged conflict and imposed wars in Afghanistan have forced millions of Afghans to flee their homeland, seeking refuge in neighboring and distant countries. These refugees have been received and supported through the generosity of host governments and communities, especially Iran and Pakistan, which have sheltered Afghan refugees for decades despite facing significant economic challenges themselves. We extend our deepest gratitude to these nations for their unwavering hospitality toward Afghan refugees and asylum seekers.

Since the Taliban's military takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, over 1.6 million additional Afghan refugees have fled to neighboring countries, escaping violence, economic collapse, and systemic rights violations. Today, the Afghan refugee and asylum-seeker population stands at an alarming 5.53 million, exerting immense pressure on host nations and communities, particularly Pakistan and Iran.

Conditions for these refugees are dire. Since mid-September last year, over 733,000 Afghans have returned from Pakistan alone. Nearly half of these returnees are women and children, many from female-headed households with heightened vulnerabilities. Around 2.5% of returnees live with disabilities, further compounding their needs. Despite the high demand for shelter, food, healthcare, and education, UNHCR's Afghanistan Refugee Response Plan remains critically underfunded by over 70%.

These needs extend beyond statistics. For millions, daily life lacks safety, stability, and access to basic rights. A recent UNHCR report shows that only a fraction of Afghan children in host countries can access education, while healthcare access

remains limited. In Iran, Afghan refugees experience service interruptions for banking and other essential services due to documentation challenges, some of them are expelled despite having documents, and in Pakistan, healthcare resources for Afghan patients are stretched beyond capacity.

To address this situation, I urge Member States to consider the following recommendations:

1. **Increase Funding Commitments:** Enhanced financial support for the Afghanistan Refugee Response Plan is essential to meet basic needs and provide critical services, especially in education, health, and livelihood programs.
2. **Expand Resettlement and Safe Pathways:** Member States should increase resettlement quotas and support pathways for Afghan refugees, such as family reunification and humanitarian visas. This will alleviate the pressure on host countries and offer refugees a chance to rebuild their lives in safety.
3. **Strengthen Legal Protections and Rights:** Afghan refugees deserve robust protection mechanisms that provide legal status, prevent forced returns, and ensure access to essential services.
4. **Support Sustainable Reintegration Efforts:** For those returning to Afghanistan, reintegration programs are vital, addressing shelter, healthcare, livelihoods, and education to ease transitions and rebuild Afghan communities.
5. **Voluntary Repatriation in Safety and Dignity:** Repatriation must always be voluntary, conducted in conditions of safety and dignity. For those who choose to return, adequate reintegration programs are essential.
6. **Upholding the Principle of Non-Refoulement:** In line with the international refugee protection regime, Afghan refugees must not be forcibly returned to situations where their lives or freedom are at risk.
7. **Support for Host Countries:** Greater international support is necessary to strengthen the infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems of countries neighboring Afghanistan, particularly Pakistan and Iran.

8. **Promote Peace and Stability in Afghanistan:** A sustainable solution for Afghan refugees ultimately requires a legitimate, inclusive, and accountable governance system in Afghanistan. The international community must press the Taliban to meet the demands of the Afghan people and international standards.

In closing, the situation of Afghan refugees is a test of our collective commitment to human rights. Let us strengthen our support and partnerships to pave a path toward security and hope for Afghan refugees and their families.

Thank you.