STATEMENT

BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
(UNHCR)

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Chairperson

I thank you for affording us the opportunity to make an intervention on the very important topic pertaining to refugees. Let me at the outset congratulate the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, His Excellency, Mr Antonio Guterres, for his insightful report which my delegation believes will assist member states in mitigating the immense challenges that refugees are faced with.

My delegation also wishes to align itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished delegate of Zambia on behalf of the Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

South Africa fully supports international efforts to strengthen and enhance the normative and legal framework developed to defend the vulnerable refugees caught up in armed conflict situations. In this regard we are of the view that there is a need to develop national policies and legislation to address the challenges faced by refugees on a daily basis.

Chairperson,

As a country we adopt a rights based approach to refugees. Thus, we have an obligation to protect and promote their fundamental freedoms and rights. It is therefore alarming to note from the High Commissioner’s report that the protection of asylum-seekers, remains a major challenge.

We are committed to the free movement of people consistent with our constitution, our values and our international obligations as a country. We would like to highlight that in South Africa, refugees and asylum seekers awaiting the determination of their status enjoy freedom of movement in the country. Both categories of people are allowed to participate in gainful employment and access basic services. Asylum seekers can work and study while awaiting finalisation of their applications.

Member States should also work together with relevant United Nations Agencies to address, amongst others, the spread of HIV and AIDS affecting refugees. We agree with the call by the High Commissioner for Refugees that HIV related issues should part of the contingency and response plans. We believe that a collection of accurate data would enable us to identify existing gaps for better preparedness.

We should confront head-on the many challenges that refugees face, especially gender-based violence and note with appreciation the UNHCR’s measures being taken in this regard.

At the regional level, South Africa is working closely with the UNHCR and countries in the region to develop regional strategies to manage mixed migration and to initiate bilateral agreements on asylum seekers who transit through numerous safe countries in search of protection. Further, we will be approaching various stakeholders including the UNHCR to assist with the development of standardised
biometric based registration systems to enable data sharing across countries in our region and the Continent. This will among other, enable young people born into refugee situations to more easily acquire their citizenship especially during cessation periods.

My delegation is of the view that countries of origin should also create conditions conducive to voluntary return. While voluntary repatriation to the country of origin is the preferred option, we would also like to encourage the option of local integration and third country resettlement in the case of refugees who have multiple nationalities.

Chairperson,

South Africa reaffirms its goal of achieving peace and stability on the African Continent and contributing toward building a better and safer world, and thus remains steadfast in our commitment to the protection of refugees worldwide.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that we stand alongside the UNHCR in our mutual effort to create a caring world at peace with itself.

I thank you.