

**Script for AHC-P recorded message - Tokyo Immigration Forum – 9-11 December 2024-
Immigration Services Agency, Ministry of Justice, Japan**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address this 4th Tokyo Immigration Forum. With its focus on enhancing cooperation between States, the Forum is an important space to exchange information and good practices on current migration and refugee trends. I want to thank the Immigration Services Agency of the Ministry of Justice of the Government of Japan for the invitation and its solid leadership in this Forum.

Today, I would like to speak about **some principled and pragmatic ways to respond to the challenges presented by onwards and mixed movements of migrants and refugees**, taking into account legitimate immigration and security concerns of countries.

UNHCR has been working with States, IOM and other partners on what we refer to as a **panoramic or whole-of-route approach** to onward and mixed movements of refugees and migrants. **A panoramic approach** is one that upholds the human rights of people on the move and protects those with international protection needs at every stage of their difficult journeys *while at the same time* ensuring that the concerns and interests of States are comprehensively addressed.

This entails identifying those who would face persecution in their home countries and developing innovative approaches for effective asylum and migration management, while maintaining the integrity of borders, national security and public order.

The approach builds on the ambition of the New York Declaration, the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. In the Asia Pacific region, it also aligns with the aims of ASEAN, the Bali Process and its Consultative Mechanism on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, as well as with the commitments made in the Bali Declarations.

The panoramic or whole-of-route approach has three complementary objectives that can be achieved through strengthened cooperation:

First, to save lives and reduce harm along the routes,

Second, to create alternatives to dangerous journeys, and

Third, to support States in strengthening asylum capacity and effectively managing onward and mixed movements.

On the first objective, **to save lives and reduce harm along the routes**, the approach recognizes that onward and mixed movements of refugees and migrants are often unsafe, violent, exploitative and sometimes fatal for the people who undertake them. They pose multifaceted **challenges for governments** in all regions of the world, including in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Myanmar and the Afghanistan situations illustrate these issues well. There are 1.3 million Rohingya stateless refugees hosted by countries in the region and 5.8 million Afghan

refugees hosted in just Iran and Pakistan, in addition to the nearly 2 million Afghans with other statuses in these countries. In both these situations, where refugees do not have sufficient protection, access to rights, national services or labour markets, they may be compelled to move onwards along the same routes as migrants.

Those who move onwards often face major challenges and threats. The maritime movements across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea are among the deadliest in the world, with 569 Rohingyas reported dead or missing in 2023, and 2024 likely to end with a higher toll.

An important part of the panoramic approach focuses on greater cooperation to **rescue and assist** those in distress at sea. Equally important is to facilitate **disembarkation** at a place of safety and to meet the immediate needs of rescuees, through appropriate **reception arrangements** and **humanitarian assistance**.

In the Asia-Pacific region, there are opportunities available for State-led action for search and rescue with the support of UN agencies, NGOs and civil society. The 2023 ASEAN Agreement on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Cooperation, once universally ratified, will set harmonized standards across the region, for predictable search and rescue coordination, reaffirming the long tradition of ASEAN Member States to help people at risk.

The second objective, **identifying and creating alternatives to dangerous journeys**, has multiple facets.

One of them, relates to **creating conditions in regions of origin** that ensure that people are not compelled to flee in the first place, and that are conducive to the sustainable and voluntary return of those who have already fled. This can be done when all stakeholders – authorities, NGOs, private sector and local communities - work together towards addressing root causes of displacement. This includes preventing and resolving statelessness, engaging in peace-building and conflict resolution, and providing financial support to boost resilience in countries of origin. The implementation of the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Nexus, which Japan actively promotes, is also key in this regard.

This second objective also refers to the **inclusion** of refugees in local economies, to leverage their contribution to the country of asylum. Most refugees are staying in countries within their region of origin. It is important to ensure that they can be offered protection and rights-centered options **where they are, and as early as possible. We encourage the provision of legal status, and access to national services**, such as education and health, in an inclusive manner. This can be achieved through investments in civil registration and documentation, schools and universities, health care systems, local businesses, and many other areas. **Development aid can**, and should, support these efforts.

Simultaneously, **legal pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration** should be available and accessible to refugees, because they complement access to asylum and third country resettlement.

One notable example of an alternative pathway in the Asia-Pacific region, is the **education pathway**, supported by the Government of the Philippines and UNHCR, which aims to

provide Rohingya refugees with access to higher education in the Philippines. Several universities have partnered with charitable organizations to offer scholarships and support, so that refugees have a pathway to self-reliance.

These pathways are also important tools to counter the scourge of **trafficking and smuggling** that exploits human beings and impacts on State sovereignty. Until we provide meaningful alternatives at a larger scale, our efforts to combat the nefarious business model of traffickers and smugglers will not be successful.

Countries present today at this 4th Tokyo Immigration Forum have many years of experience in generously providing safety for those forced to flee, as well as in managing labour migration. I want to acknowledge your efforts and to encourage your continued cooperation and concrete measures on these issues.

Turning to the third objective — to support State efforts to strengthen asylum systems and manage onward and mixed movements effectively — we must look beyond border controls. We must think outside the box, but not outside the law.

Both aspects of asylum and migration management function hand-in-hand, because where lawful avenues are available to migrants, asylum procedures are not overburdened or misused, which helps to safeguard the integrity of, and public trust in, national asylum systems. And when the asylum systems swiftly identify people who are in need of international protection from those who do not, people who are simply seeking migration opportunities, are discouraged from resorting to asylum channels in order to enter or to stay in destination countries.

UNHCR is firmly committed to supporting efforts to strengthen fair and efficient asylum processes in the region, so that those who are in need of international protection can be quickly identified and protected, whereas those who are not, can be swiftly returned to their countries of origin.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that onwards and mixed movements of refugees and migrants in the Asia-Pacific region is a growing challenge. The current approaches have not adequately addressed the needs of States nor the rights of people on the move. The panoramic approach calls for a collective commitment to a comprehensive response, one that protects lives at the earliest stages of the journeys, provides alternatives to dangerous journeys and seeks solutions. No single country, organization, or community can achieve this on their own. UNHCR welcomes the opportunity to advance a panoramic approach for the Asia-Pacific region along with all of you.

Thank you.

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