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30 January 2021

Notre/Our code: GEO/HCR/016/21

Subject: **New Year Letter to Partners**

Dear, much valued partners!

As this New Year starts to unroll, following a long 'holiday' period (experienced by most of us rather quietly and somewhat restrictively!), I would like to greet you with the hope that 2021 will eventually bring more normality back into our lives, will produce opportunities for even stronger cooperation, and will help us support a turn for the better in the lives of those we serve. Many, many Georgians are struggling. At the same time refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, many IDPs, foreign migrants, and several asylum-seekers from key refugee-producing countries nonetheless rejected from refugee status, are thrown into extreme situations which will not be quick to turn around. Their isolation can be extreme, cut off from family, friends and networks, suffering the long trauma of displacement and exile, stressed about their legal status and the future of their families, and now combined with more extreme challenges for self-reliance due to COVID. This takes a huge mental toll, that may last even longer, which frankly UNHCR and partners are not well equipped to address.

The courage, innovations, flexibility and commitment to the cause last year demonstrated by all of you helped us bring some relief and comfort, through legal and social assistance, better outreach to communities, continued efforts to help with jobs and livelihoods, and expanded cash assistance for the desperate. We also managed to organize and support a humanitarian corridor for people in Gali to access their pensions. Nearly 2,400 pensioners crossed the Enguri bridge to use mobile bank and pharmacy services, between October and the end of the year.

We will need these efforts just as much in 2021! As our High Commissioner tells us in UNHCR, the marks of true leadership from all of us will be empathy, compassion, flexibility and pragmatism in our working methods, and a strict focus on supporting our clientele (though this is not a word he uses). The overriding priority is to ensure inclusion of populations of concern in all possible forms of support as well as economic and social activity and recovery.

Georgia has many inclusive policies and best practice approaches to protecting refugees. We need to keep steering towards their better translation into practice. Meanwhile, we see so many examples of individuals who have managed to integrate and participate in Georgian life strikingly well after only a few years! We will continue to highlight these examples in our public information and communications, assuring the Georgian population that hosting refugees is the right way to go, that such diversity and participation enriches Georgian society, and that global responsibility-sharing for helping the displaced is in Georgia's national interest.

More than a year has now passed since the world, including the Government of Georgia, gathered together with UNHCR in Geneva for the first ever Global Refugee Forum (GRF). As envisaged through the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in 2018, the GRF was the largest-ever gathering on refugee matters, building on months of consultations and bringing together some 3,000 participants from diverse segments of society, including States, the private sector, civil society, faith-based organizations, sports entities, humanitarian organizations, development actors and academia.

The GRF generated some 1,400 pledges, across a broad range of areas. Among these, 15 ambitious pledges were given by actors in Georgia. As a concrete next step in this context, the High-level Officials' Meeting on 14 - 15 December 2021 will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress at the halfway point between the first GRF and the next one¹. As a key milestone in the implementation of the approach set out in the GCR, the meeting will be an essential moment to review the impact of pledges and initiatives to inform the direction for the next GRF. In this context UNHCR also wishes to remind you that progress updates on current pledges, new pledges and good practices can continuously be submitted through the Global Compact on Refugees website as linked to in the footnote.

I would like to take the opportunity to highlight UNHCR Georgia's main directions in 2021. We hope to consult with you on these priorities in February, as well as to try to look further ahead, despite many unpredictable factors. Drawing on global, regional and local expertise and partnerships, UNHCR Georgia will continue, in cooperation with all of you, its advocacy and operational support towards improved implementation in the following areas:

- **Access to, and the quality of the asylum procedures.** We will build on good cooperation enjoyed with border and asylum authorities, and will provide expert and technical support in development of a State mechanism responsible for addressing vulnerable cases in the asylum procedures.
- **The judiciary and legal aid system,** advocating for a “specialization” on refugee and migration cases within these structures, in order to enhance quality legal representation and decision-making on applications for refugee status; providing individuals with legal assistance in the refugee determination procedure.
- **Pursuing inclusion** of persons of concern to UNHCR in Government assistance programmes, also at the municipal level, to maintain dignity and basic standards of living during the pandemic; providing individuals with legal and social counselling and support to access to available services.
- **Temporary cash assistance for the most vulnerable,** with expanded scope in the COVID context, in both TAT and Abkhazia.
- **Redoubling efforts to support livelihoods** and find jobs for refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs alike in TAT and Abkhazia.
- **Advocating for improved freedom of movement** between Abkhazia and TAT, in order to enhance access to rights of the IDP population of Gali; providing support to the most vulnerable through a humanitarian corridor.
- **Increased opportunities for language learning for refugees and asylum-seekers,** ensuring that everyone who commits to learning the Georgian language has a chance to do so.
- **Education,** supporting the Government's pledges to improve access to general education for refugees; improving access to, and refining the recognition procedures of vocational education.
- **Integration,** supporting the Government to coordinate efforts in the context of the development of a State Programme for the Integration of International Protection Holders and Asylum Seekers, as envisaged in the Migration Strategy for 2021-2030.
- **Migration/Asylum management,** supporting Government efforts to further strengthen coherence and coordination in migration policies and practice that impact the efficiency of the asylum procedures.
- **Community-based protection,** strengthening outreach and interaction with refugee and IDP populations through the engagement of community group facilitators and volunteer networks.
- **Furthering the eradication of statelessness in Georgia,** supporting the Government with implementing pledges made in this respect at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in October 2019.

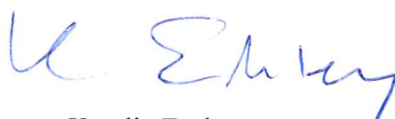
¹ <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/channel/pledges-contributions>

In late 2020, UNHCR contributed to Government-led research assessing the impact of the pandemic on the daily lives of the people we serve. A survey commissioned by UNHCR in the context showed that several of people of concern to UNHCR have been faring fairly well under normal circumstances in terms of gaining access to relevant assistance and employment, finding their way in the formal and informal economy, only partially assisted by UNHCR and partners. Language proficiency and interaction with neighbours, a general feeling of safety while living in Georgia – these were all positive signs and a reasonable degree of integration was not such a distant prospect for some. But it was clear that the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on their general well-being. Half of the respondents stated they had lost their income, and most reported heightened levels of stress and anxiety. The education of children has been a huge challenge, with many children lacking the means to participate meaningfully in lessons provided only online.

While we should remain hopeful, it may be more realistic to expect that the pandemic will limit our daily lives still for some time to come. As is the case every year, UNHCR will not reach its aims without the diligent support from you, our partners. We therefore look forward to a close cooperation with all of you also in 2021, a year we hope will include more face-to-face interaction and further development of meaningful relationships.

Should we still have to resort to interacting more on our screens than in real life, please do not let this stop you from reaching out to us with ideas, concerns and questions. UNHCR takes pride in its “participatory approach” with regards to its beneficiaries, partners and programmes.

With warm regards from all of us at UNHCR,



Kemlin Furley
UNHCR Representative in Georgia

