

Secretary-General's Remarks to NGOs, volunteers and media

Lesbos, Greece, 18 June 2016

[As delivered]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have had an unforgettable visit.

Today, I met refugees from some of the world's most troubled places.

They have lived through a nightmare. And that nightmare is not over.

But here in Lesbos, they have found relief from war and persecution.

I commend the Greek authorities, the people of Lesbos and the humanitarian community for your extraordinary response.

Lesbos is an island of peace – and you are a sea of solidarity.

You have opened your homes, hearts and wallets to support people in need.

The refugee families I met today shared their hopes with me: School for their children. Jobs to provide for their families. The opportunity to give back to their communities.

They yearn to go home – but know that remains a distant dream.

The United Nations is doing all we can to mobilize support.

But across the region, refugee conditions are worsening.

Many are becoming destitute. Girls are being forced into early marriage. Half of all refugee children are out of school. Many have been forced to beg on the streets, or are becoming the victims of exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

The challenge is growing. Every day around the world, thousands of families continue to flee their homes.

Every month, 450 people lose their lives in the Mediterranean – that's the equivalent of two full transcontinental passenger jets. Month after month after month.

The international community must do more to resolve conflicts and address the factors causing so much suffering and upheaval.

We must also stand together against border closures, barriers and bigotry.

I call on the countries of Europe to respond with a humane and human rights-based approach.

Detention is not the answer. It should end immediately.

Let us work together to resettle more people, provide legal pathways, and better integrate refugees.

I recognize the difficulties. But the world has the wealth, the capacity and the duty to meet this challenge.

I thank those countries showing leadership, especially the developing countries that host 90 per cent of the world's refugees.

It is time for the world to share fully in this responsibility.

That is our political and moral obligation. That is our humanitarian imperative. It is what we must do as a human family.

One of the most beautiful words in the Greek lexicon is philoxenia -- friendship towards strangers.

That is what I saw today through the resilience of refugees, and the empathy of all those who are working with them, around the clock, to save lives and secure their future.

I will leave here humbled by the enormity of the challenge, but inspired by all I have seen is possible when we come together in response.

Thank you.