



CONFERENCE

18TH – 19TH JUNE 2019
BERLIN



FILIPPO GRANDI, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Berlin, 18 June 2019

[Edited transcript of remarks]

Good morning, and thank you, Minister, for your opening statement.

I have worked with refugees for 35 years - longer than many of you in this room have lived. But one thing that I have found, wherever I was with refugees, is that education was the most important thing. For young refugees, and for their parents, for their families, for their communities. This has been the case for all the refugee communities that I have encountered - whether Afghan refugees returning home 20 years ago, or with Palestinian refugees, with whom I have worked many years.

I am so happy that Aeham played the piano, because he comes from Yarmouk, the place where Palestinian refugees used to be in Syria before the war, and which now unfortunately has been destroyed. With Afghans, with Palestinians, with Rwandan refugees, all those that I have worked with over the years, that's been the constant message. Even before food, they talk about schools. And I think it is very significant.

I am very grateful to the Foreign Ministry and to all of you for being here today. Tomorrow, on the eve of World Refugee Day, we will announce here in Berlin what we call the "Global Trends" - the yearly official statistics and analysis of the situation of forced displacement around the world. It is also very significant that the Foreign Ministry has given all of us this opportunity to be here today to talk about education and higher education for refugees. I am flying to Jordan directly from Berlin to travel to another important country hosting many refugees, Palestinians, Iraqis, and now Syrians.



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The messages that I will pass will not be difficult ones. And the figures will not be good. Last year, some 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide - refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people.

Unfortunately, these figures will not be any better this year. They will be a symptom of how unable we have become to make peace in this world. They will also indicate how complicated these human flows have become, in places like Libya, Central America, and many other parts of the world.

The figures, and our broader analysis, will also be worrying because they will point to the increasing politicization of issues related to refugees and migrants. This builds electoral support consensus for some, but at the same time, complicates solutions for everybody else, and especially for refugees and displaced people.

But one message that I want to already pass today as we discuss education, is that we should not resign ourselves to the narrative that it is impossible to solve this huge global problem of forced displacement. I say this because every day in my travels around the world, I see that there is a lot of solidarity for people that are fleeing from war, persecution, discrimination and violence - for refugees and the displaced.

I saw this when the Rohingya refugees fled again in large numbers from Myanmar just a couple of years ago, and the first responders, the first people who brought them food and blankets and shelter, were the very poor communities in that area of Bangladesh.

I see it in every trip I make to Africa, where people in villages say, "Look we are poor, and we are not happy to receive all these refugees, but can we deny them the little that they need, our brothers and sisters?"

And we see it in Germany. When I come here, and I come quite often, I see areas or institutions where refugees can enjoy access to services, can learn the language, can become ready for jobs. There is a lot of solidarity. Many of these initiatives are run by civil society.

And for all the talk about rejection, about closure, about danger and risk, I think we need to build on that broad solidarity – which has also found its institutional home in the Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed in December last year.



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Here, once more, I want to thank Germany for its extraordinary support to the establishment of the Compact. I also want to thank the organizers and all of you for having put the Compact and its implementation at the centre of your debate. As the Foreign Minister said, it is important that this document does not just remain a document, but that we make it real. And focusing on education is one of the big objectives that we have.

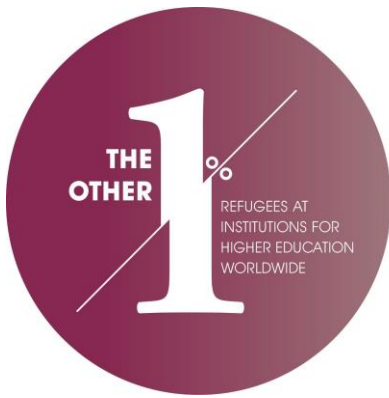
The Compact is about building larger coalitions of institutions and people to respond to the situation of forced displacement. It is an effort to consider the response as developmental. We want to look at investments in education, in employment, in supporting host communities, in addressing the impact on the environment that very often the big influxes have in very deprived areas.

I cannot see any greater means towards these goals than investing in education. Because education is an opportunity in itself, it is also the best avenue to self-reliance and perhaps, even more so, to that dignity that people affected by war and by violence are so often deprived of.

You know the education statistics for refugees are not good. 61 % of children in primary school, versus a world average of 92% for the general population. 23 % in secondary education, versus an average of 84%. And then the famous 1% in higher education versus the other 99%. I am often asked whether there is a refugee crisis. I am always very nervous to talk about that. But there is one certainty: there is a refugee education crisis that needs to be addressed very, very, urgently.

Hence, my gratitude. I really want to take this opportunity to thank the German government for supporting the DAFI programme so strongly. It is significant that the DAFI programme, which many of you, as I understand, have benefitted or benefit from, that the DAFI programme is named after Albert Einstein. There is very famous UNHCR T-shirt with Einstein's image and saying "Einstein was a refugee". Very often I heard that reflection: "What if Einstein was not received as a refugee? What if he had been pushed back? What would have humanity lost if that had happened?" And I think that this is an important reflection for all of us today.

The number of people that have benefitted from DAFI scholarships is astounding. Last year alone, more than 6,000 refugees benefitted from the DAFI scholarships. I have always liked the approach of this programme: to favour giving scholarships close to the people, to where the people are refugees. This facilitates greater numbers of people benefitting. It is a more agile approach to higher education. And it helps also to fulfil important roles that higher education has in the lives of refugees: preparing them for when they go back home, and can contribute to the reconstruction of their country;



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to allow them to have, while they are in exile, a dignified life; and also, wherever they can, to contribute to the lives and the welfare and the prosperity of the communities that are hosting them.

One fundamental aspect of the Global Compact is that we should stop talking about “refugee camps”. Refugee camps are sometimes necessary, but they are a symbol of ghettos, of isolation, of exclusion. We want to really talk about inclusion. Integration is sometimes difficult, it is maybe possible here in a very stable and prosperous country like Germany, but in other countries hosting huge numbers of refugees, integration is difficult. But at least, inclusion during the period of exile is important.

Education is extremely important in that respect, and I was happy to hear from the Minister that efforts are being made to expand this approach to other countries - Canada for example, and New Zealand. Let's also not forget that this effort should be very closely coordinated with efforts to improve the other percentages, not just the 1%, but the 61%, the 23%. If refugees cannot get through the entire education cycle, they cannot get to the point where they are ready for higher education.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the German Academic Exchange service, the DAAD, and especially the “Leadership for Syria” programme that you will also discuss here. The role of these institutions is very important, because this is another important aspect of the Compact. We don't want the responses to forced displacement to be operations that are carried out between states and United Nations, and maybe a few NGO's. We want to expand them further. We want to expand to what we call the “whole of society” approach, in which academia has a very important role to play.

I also wish to mention other ongoing initiatives that will be discussed here, HOPES, which is a scholarship programme for Syrian refugees funded by the European Union; and the European Refugee Qualification passport initiative supported by the Council of Europe and by NOKUT of Norway. This is very important, because not only is higher education difficult to achieve for refugees, but even when they do achieve it, the recognition of those achievements are not always obvious when people move from country to country. This has significantly negative consequences on insertion in the world of work, for example.

I hope that in your deliberations here, you will not lose sight of our main shared objective – and certainly, an objective of UNHCR, which is to really go beyond that 1%. The title of this conference is “The other 1%”; I think it should be “The other 99%”. This is the target that everybody should have, and we should be ambitious in this respect.



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Remember, when I spoke about an education crisis, this is very real. Take the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh - almost one million people, with very few kids going to school. Or the four million Venezuelans who have left their country to neighboring countries and beyond. They go to local schools, but those schools are cracking under the immense pressure of this huge population.

I can give you many, many variations of how this education crisis is impacting entire societies and depriving kids of a future. Restoring a sense that education is central in this response is fundamental, and this is what you are going to discuss here. And please, like the Foreign Minister said, bring your thoughts, showcase what you have done, and make pledges for the future when we meet in December at the Global Refugee Forum that we will organize in Geneva.

Let me just conclude by saying that all that I have said now, is not just what my colleagues at UNHCR and I think. I am really trying to convey what I always hear in my travels.

I have heard this for years from young refugees; but also – as in South America - many times from young people in the communities hosting refugees, who are also impacted by this crisis.

This is what I hear from refugee students, or people that are at the age of being students and cannot be.

This is what I hear even more often from parents, who have not had an education but whose entire hope in a difficult life is the education of their children.

So these are the worries that I hear, and that I am conveying to you; the worries that without education, there is only a life of dependency, a life of exclusion, and sometimes worse. The temptation to embrace bad ideas and bad practices and become not a contributor to society, but a threat to society.

Education fulfills many important roles. And we really owe it to those parents, to those families, to those communities, to those young people that are so starved, that are so eager to have an education. We need to restore in them a sense that life is great, that life has opportunity, that in life you can contribute, and not be - as often is portrayed - just a burden.



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I am very happy that many of the people here are students, are refugees, and they can bring their life experiences and share it with all of us. I would like to ask all of you to come up with new creative ideas, challenge the status quo, and give us some food for thought - so that when the Forum happens in December and as we go beyond in making this Compact a reality, we can really transform that 1% into a much greater number.

Thank you very much.