

UN secretary-general praises Iran for hosting Afghan refugees



Islamabad, February 19 (RHC)-- UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi have praised Iran and Pakistan for hosting millions of Afghan refugees despite receiving minimal support from the international community.

Guterres and Grandi made the remarks on Monday, addressing a two-day Refugee Summit in Islamabad, entitled "40 Years of Hosting Afghan Refugees." They commended the Islamic Republic of Iran for taking various initiatives to boost the quality of life for Afghan refugees with its own resources despite economic pressures.

"Afghans now constitute the largest group of arrivals in Europe, exceeding for the first time the arrivals from Syria," Guterres said, expressing regret that returns to Afghanistan have hit a historical low.

US sanctions on Tehran are hurting the Europeans in ways unheard of until now, where Afghans migrating from Iran pose an immediate problem to the bloc. "Afghanistan and its people cannot be abandoned. Now is the time for the international community to act and to deliver," he said.

Grandi also praised the hospitality of Iran and Pakistan, saying "This is what we are here to mark today: the compassion, the hospitality, the solidarity of the people of the host countries." Iran spends \$8 billion on Afghan migrants every year in various sectors, and has repeatedly complained that the countries

which caused the displacement of Afghans must accept responsibility and help cover the costs.

Last year, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Tehran cannot afford the heavy costs of addressing the problem of refugees, saying the US sanctions have disabled Iran from paying billions of dollars in expenses necessary for such plans.

The president threatened parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that Iran will have to halt cooperation in preventing the influx of refugees if the other parties stand idle and only seek to benefit from the nuclear agreement.

Unlike the U.S. and some of the EU countries, Iranian government gives the refugees and immigrants, even the illegal ones, all the services required for a dignified life. According to officials, some 500,000 foreign students enrolled in around 28,000 schools across the country last school year, most of whom are Afghan immigrants.

Four decades of war and conflict have produced more than 2.6 million Afghan registered refugees, with 1.4 million living in Pakistan, and over 950,000 living in Iran as of 2016, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

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