

Canberra

This is a summary of a speech by **Dr Peter Shergold** to the UNAA (ACT) on 16 June 2023. He has been a senior public servant for many years, and is currently the chair of Australians for UNHCR.

The meeting began with the reading of the UNHCR statement for Refugee Day. It referred to UNHCR's flagship which found that by the end of 2022, the number of people displaced by war, persecution, violence and human rights abuses stood at a record 108.4 million, up 19.1 million on a year earlier, which was the biggest ever increase. It urged greater international support for host countries and avenues for helping refugees. The guest speaker then made the following comments:

1. The length of time displaced people remain as refugees has been increasing and is now close to 20 years on average. Germany has the best record for resettlement.
2. UNHCR's Budget is always stretched and in need of support, and many Australians give help via donations.
3. We should stop focusing on border protection and terrorism, and talk about this country's success in accepting many refugees over the years, and celebrate the millionth refugee arriving this year.
4. The federal government has committed to raise the intake on humanitarian grounds to 32,000, but this has not yet been implemented.
5. Public opinion (according to the Lowy Institute Poll) favours a change – and two thirds polled want more action on options like the following 'streams' – (a) economic, sponsored by employers; (b) community, sponsored by citizens; and (c) university sponsorship of qualified academics.
6. A whole-of-government approach to resettlement services is needed, and refugees themselves can help design policy and take greater responsibility for decisions about their own lives. NSW is leading the way on this.
7. Maintain advocacy with all political parties and independents to increase support for refugees.

References

UNHCR Report – www.unhcr.org/global-trends

Refugee Council – www.refugeecouncil.org.au

QPLC WB 21-7 Refugees and Asylum Seekers and QF 22—1 Refugees
at www.quakersaustralia.info/organisation/aym/quaker-peace-and-legislation-committee

Canberra, June 2023