



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
124th Assembly and related meetings
Panama City (Panama), 15 – 20 April 2011



Governing Council
P.1
Item 12

CL/188/12-

16 April 2011

PARLIAMENTARY ACTION IN SUPPORT OF THE UNHCR AND REFUGEE
PROTECTION

DRAFT PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT

The Governing Council is invited to adopt a parliamentary statement on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

The draft statement below has been prepared in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It has been shared with the Executive Committee and the Committee on International Humanitarian Law for their observations and endorsement.

We, parliamentarians, meeting in Panama on the occasion of the 124th IPU Assembly, take this opportunity to renew our commitment to extend support for the protection of those who have been forcibly displaced or are stateless and for UNHCR, the principal humanitarian agency of the United Nations system dedicated to their protection.

There are today some 43 million forcibly displaced people around the globe of whom 15 million are refugees. There are 12 million stateless people. Global trends such as environmental degradation and climate change, combined with mega-trends such as urbanization, pose challenges for both UNHCR and States and may call for new approaches to providing protection and assistance to those who are forcibly displaced.

The problem of statelessness has grown over the past decade owing to issues linked to the dissolution of states, the operation of conflicting nationality laws and implementation of legislation which discriminates against women in the passage of nationality. Statelessness prevents individuals from travelling abroad, enrolling children in school, having access to employment and educational opportunities and keeps all too many lives in limbo.

We recall debates and resolutions that we have adopted at IPU Conferences in recent years on the subject of refugees and internally displaced persons. We commend the IPU and the UNHCR for their work to sensitize parliaments to the problem of forced displacement and the ways in which parliamentarians can assist in finding solutions to the plight of forcibly displaced and stateless people.

We are particularly pleased with the handbooks for parliamentarians they have produced together on *Refugee protection: A guide to international refugee law* and *Nationality and Statelessness*, which have been translated into 36 and 27 language versions respectively. We invite them to update the Handbook for parliamentarians on *Refugee protection: A guide to international refugee law* to reflect contemporary challenges and developments over the past decade.

We recognize that more needs to be done to address the plight of refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and stateless people. We pledge to do our part, as members of parliament.

In particular, we reaffirm that the *1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol* are the core international refugee law instruments and that they remain crucial for the protection of refugees. We therefore pledge to strengthen the implementation of these instruments and to consider developing flexible tools and approaches to deal with contemporary protection challenges that do not fit comfortably within the 1951 Convention framework.

Similarly, we reaffirm that *the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* are the principal international instruments for addressing statelessness. We encourage all States that have not yet done so to accede to or ratify these instruments and lift any reservations lodged at the time of accession. We greatly welcome the efforts of UNHCR and propose to work with it in seeking to enact the necessary legal framework and introduce safeguards to avoid situations of statelessness, including through ensuring that every child acquires a nationality at birth and promoting gender equality to enable women to confer nationality on their children.

We propose to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and fiftieth anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in an appropriate manner in our parliaments.

We applaud the adoption in October 2009 of *the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa*. We encourage States in Africa to sign and ratify the Kampala Convention and parliaments to adopt implementing legislation. We encourage States in other regions of the world to consider an analogous approach to improve the provision of protection and assistance for the world's some 26 million internally displaced persons.

We welcome the 60th anniversary of UNHCR and recognize its pivotal role in providing international protection and assistance to refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons.

Finally we pledge to review the implementation of these conventions in our countries and to report back to the IPU on the results thereof. Specifically, we wish to see progress in the area of accessions to the principal refugee and statelessness conventions, introduction of legislative safeguards for the prevention and reduction of statelessness, and new approaches to deal

with those displaced within or across national boundaries owing to environmental factors and natural disasters linked to climate change.