

# *Statute*

OF THE OFFICE OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER  
FOR REFUGEES



UNHCR

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 428 (v) OF 14 DECEMBER 1950

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STATUTE OF THE OFFICE  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

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WITH AN  
INTRODUCTORY NOTE  
BY THE OFFICE OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY THE OFFICE OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES  
(UNHCR)

IN RESOLUTION 319 (IV) OF 3 DECEMBER 1949, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish a High Commissioner's Office for Refugees as of 1 January 1951.

The Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 1950 as Annex to Resolution 428 (V). In this Resolution, reproduced on page 6, the Assembly also called upon the Governments to cooperate with the High Commissioner in the performance of his or her functions concerning refugees falling under the competence of the Office. In accordance with the Statute, the work of the High Commissioner is humanitarian and social and of an entirely non-political character.

The functions of the High Commissioner are defined in the Statute and in various Resolutions subsequently adopted by the General Assembly. Resolutions concerning the High Commissioner's Office adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council are available on "RefWorld," UNHCR's CD-ROM.

The High Commissioner reports annually to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council. Pursuant to paragraph 4 of the Statute, an Advisory Committee on Refugees was established by the Economic and Social Council <sup>(1)</sup> and was later reconstituted as the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee <sup>(2)</sup>. The latter was replaced in 1958 by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme <sup>(3)</sup>. Members of

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(1) Economic and Social Council Resolution 393 (XIII) B of 10 September 1951.

(2) Economic and Social Council Resolution 565 (XIX) of 31 March 1955 adopted pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 832 (IX) of 21 October 1954.



the Executive Committee are elected by the Economic and Social Council on the widest possible geographical basis from those States with a demonstrated interest in and devotion to the solution of refugee problems. Under its terms of reference, the Executive Committee, *inter alia*, reviews and approves the material assistance programme of the High Commissioner's office and advises the High Commissioner at his or her request on the exercise of his or her functions under the Statute. The Executive Committee was originally composed of 24 states. By 1996, membership had expanded to 50 states, comprising Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Somalia, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, United Republic of Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela, F.R. Yugoslavia [Serbia and Montenegro], and Zaire.

The first United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was Gerrit J. van Heuven Goedhart from the Netherlands (1951-1956). He was succeeded by Auguste R. Lindt from Switzerland (1957-1960); Felix Schnyder from Switzerland (1961-1965); Sadruddin Aga Khan from Iran (1966-1977); Poul Hartling from Denmark (1978-1985); Jean-Pierre Hocké from Switzerland (1986-1989); and Thorvald Stoltenberg from Norway (Jan. 1990-Nov. 1990). The present High Commissioner is Sadako Ogata from Japan, who assumed office on 18 February 1991.

UNHCR's headquarters are located in Geneva, Switzerland. The High Commissioner has appointed representatives and correspondents in over 120 countries throughout the world.

*Geneva, March 1996*

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(3) General Assembly Resolution 1166 (XII) of 26 November 1957 and Economic and Social Council Resolution 672 (XXV) of 30 April 1958.



GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 428 (V)  
of 14 December 1950

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

In view of its resolution 319 A (IV) of 3 December 1949,

1. Adopts the annex to the present resolution, being the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
2. Calls upon Governments to co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the performance of his functions concerning refugees falling under the competence of his Office, especially by:
  - (a) Becoming parties to international conventions providing for the protection of refugees, and taking the necessary steps of implementation under such conventions;
  - (b) Entering into special agreements with the High Commissioner for the execution of measures calculated to improve the situation of refugees and to reduce the number requiring protection;
  - (c) Admitting refugees to their territories, not excluding those in the most destitute categories;
  - (d) Assisting the High Commissioner in his efforts to promote the voluntary repatriation of refugees;
  - (e) Promoting the assimilation of refugees, especially by facilitating their naturalization;



- (f) Providing refugees with travel and other documents such as would normally be provided to other aliens by their national authorities, especially documents which would facilitate their resettlement;
  - (g) Permitting refugees to transfer their assets and especially those necessary for their resettlement;
  - (h) Providing the High Commissioner with information concerning the number and condition of refugees, and laws and regulations concerning them.
3. Requests the Secretary-General to transmit the present resolution, together with the annex attached thereto, also to States non-members of the United Nations, with a view to obtaining their co-operation in its implementation.



ANNEX

STATUTE OF THE OFFICE  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER  
FOR REFUGEES

CHAPTER I  
General provisions

1. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, acting under the authority of the General Assembly, shall assume the function of providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting Governments and, subject to the approval of the Governments concerned, private organizations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities.

In the exercise of his functions, more particularly when difficulties arise, and for instance with regard to any controversy concerning the international status of these persons, the High Commissioner shall request the opinion of the advisory committee on refugees if it is created.

2. The work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees.
3. The High Commissioner shall follow policy directives given him by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council.
4. The Economic and Social Council may decide, after hearing the





views of the High Commissioner on the subject, to establish an advisory committee on refugees, which shall consist of representatives of States Members and States non-members of the United Nations, to be selected by the Council on the basis of their demonstrated interest in and devotion to the solution of the refugee problem.

5. The General Assembly shall review, not later than at its eighth regular session, the arrangements for the Office of the High Commissioner with a view to determining whether the Office should be continued beyond 31 December 1953.

## CHAPTER II

### Functions of the High Commissioner

6. The competence of the High Commissioner shall extend to:

A. (i) Any person who has been considered a refugee under the Arrangements of 12 May 1926 and of 30 June 1928 or under the Conventions of 28 October 1933 and 10 February 1938, the Protocol of 14 September 1939 or the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization.

(ii) Any person who, as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to return to it.

Decisions as to eligibility taken by the International Refugee Organization during the period of its activities shall not pre-



vent the status of refugee being accorded to persons who fulfil the conditions of the present paragraph;

The competence of the High Commissioner shall cease to apply to any person defined in section A above if:

- (a) He has voluntarily re-availed himself of the protection of the country of his nationality; or
  - (b) Having lost his nationality, he has voluntarily re-acquired it; or
  - (c) He has acquired a new nationality, and enjoys the protection of the country of his new nationality; or
  - (d) He has voluntarily re-established himself in the country which he left or outside which he remained owing to fear of persecution; or
  - (e) He can no longer, because the circumstances in connexion with which he has been recognized as a refugee have ceased to exist, claim grounds other than those of personal convenience for continuing to refuse to avail himself of the protection of the country of his nationality. Reasons of a purely economic character may not be invoked; or
  - (f) Being a person who has no nationality, he can no longer, because the circumstances in connexion with which he has been recognized as a refugee have ceased to exist and he is able to return to the country of his former habitual residence, claim grounds other than those of personal convenience for continuing to refuse to return to that country;
- B.** Any other person who is outside the country of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, the country of his former habitual residence, because he has or had well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality or political opinion and is unable or, because of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of the country of his nationality, or, if he has no nationality, to return to the country of his former habitual residence.



7. Provided that the competence of the High Commissioner as defined in paragraph 6 above shall not extend to a person:

- (a) Who is a national of more than one country unless he satisfies the provisions of the preceding paragraph in relation to each of the countries of which he is a national; or
- (b) Who is recognized by the competent authorities of the country in which he has taken residence as having the rights and obligations which are attached to the possession of the nationality of that country; or
- (c) Who continues to receive from other organs or agencies of the United Nations protection or assistance; or
- (d) In respect of whom there are serious reasons for considering that he has committed a crime covered by the provisions of treaties of extradition or a crime mentioned in article VI of the London Charter of the International Military Tribunal or by the provisions of article 14, paragraph 2, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.\*

8. The High Commissioner shall provide for the protection of refugees falling under the competence of his Office by:

- (a) Promoting the conclusion and ratification of international conventions for the protection of refugees, supervising their application and proposing amendments thereto;
- (b) Promoting through special agreements with Governments the execution of any measures calculated to improve the situation of refugees and to reduce the number requiring protection;
- (c) Assisting governmental and private efforts to promote voluntary repatriation or assimilation within new national communities;
- (d) Promoting the admission of refugees, not excluding those in the most destitute categories, to the territories of States;
- (e) Endeavouring to obtain permission for refugees to transfer their assets and especially those necessary for their resettlement;

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\* See UN General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.



- (f) Obtaining from Governments information concerning the number and conditions of refugees in their territories and the laws and regulations concerning them;
- (g) Keeping in close touch with the Governments and inter-governmental organizations concerned;
- (h) Establishing contact in such manner as he may think best with private organizations dealing with refugee questions;
- (i) Facilitating the co-ordination of the efforts of private organizations concerned with the welfare of refugees.

9. The High Commissioner shall engage in such additional activities, including repatriation and resettlement, as the General Assembly may determine, within the limits of the resources placed at his disposal.

10. The High Commissioner shall administer any funds, public or private, which he receives for assistance to refugees, and shall distribute them among the private and, as appropriate, public agencies which he deems best qualified to administer such assistance.

The High Commissioner may reject any offers which he does not consider appropriate or which cannot be utilized.

The High Commissioner shall not appeal to Governments for funds or make a general appeal, without the prior approval of the General Assembly.

The High Commissioner shall include in his annual report a statement of his activities in this field.

11. The High Commissioner shall be entitled to present his views before the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies.

The High Commissioner shall report annually to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council; his report shall be considered as a separate item on the agenda of the General Assembly.

12. The High Commissioner may invite the co-operation of the various specialized agencies.



CHAPTER III  
Organization and finances

13. The High Commissioner shall be elected by the General Assembly on the nomination of the Secretary-General. The terms of appointment of the High Commissioner shall be proposed by the Secretary-General and approved by the General Assembly. The High Commissioner shall be elected for a term of three years, from 1 January 1951.

14. The High Commissioner shall appoint, for the same term, a Deputy High Commissioner of a nationality other than his own.

15. (a) Within the limits of the budgetary appropriations provided, the staff of the Office of the High Commissioner shall be appointed by the High Commissioner and shall be responsible to him in the exercise of their functions.

(b) Such staff shall be chosen from persons devoted to the purposes of the Office of the High Commissioner.

(c) Their conditions of employment shall be those provided under the staff regulations adopted by the General Assembly and the rules promulgated thereunder by the Secretary-General.

(d) Provision may also be made to permit the employment of personnel without compensation.

16. The High Commissioner shall consult the Government of the countries of residence of refugees as to the need for appointing representatives therein. In any country recognizing such need, there may be appointed a representative approved by the Government of that country. Subject to the foregoing, the same representative may serve in more than one country.

17. The High Commissioner and the Secretary-General shall make appropriate arrangements for liaison and consultation on matters of mutual interest.



18. The Secretary-General shall provide the High Commissioner with all necessary facilities within budgetary limitations.

19. The Office of the High Commissioner shall be located in Geneva, Switzerland.

20. The Office of the High Commissioner shall be financed under the budget of the United Nations. Unless the General Assembly subsequently decides otherwise, no expenditure other than administrative expenditures relating to the functioning of the Office of the High Commissioner shall be borne on the budget of the United Nations and all other expenditures relating to the activities of the High Commissioner shall be financed by voluntary contributions.

21. The administration of the Office of the High Commissioner shall be subject to the Financial Regulations of the United Nations and to the financial rules promulgated thereunder by the Secretary-General.

22. Transactions relating to the High Commissioner's funds shall be subject to audit by the United Nations Board of Auditors, provided that the Board may accept audited accounts from the agencies to which funds have been allocated. Administrative arrangements for the custody of such funds and their allocation shall be agreed between the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General in accordance with the Financial Regulations of the United Nations and rules promulgated thereunder by the Secretary-General.







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