

## **UNHCR conducted Regional Conference on refugee protection and international migration in Central Asia**

On 15-16 March 2011, a conference on refugee protection and international migration in Central Asia has taken place in Almaty. It examined the protection challenges posed by mixed migratory movements in the region, and collaborative approaches to address them based on existing good practices in the region. The conference was organized by UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (IOM) in cooperation with the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) and supported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It is being hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan and organized with the financial support of the European Commission and Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, U.S. Department of State.

Ms Erika Feller, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, was speaking at the opening session of the conference. "Migration is not a new phenomenon in the region, but remains an important issue for governments. While the key drivers of today's movements are economic benefits, forced displacement also continues to be a reality," said Ms Feller noting that Central Asia hosts many refugees from Afghanistan and other countries and that internal conflict continues to be a threat. Ms Feller urged the participants of the conference to explore how effective asylum systems and better integration of refugees can help states to find the right balance between national security and managing borders on the one hand, and refugee protection on the other.

More than 100 representatives mostly at Ministerial level, from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russian Federation and People's Republic of China attended the event. Governments, international agencies, and civil society discussed topics such as: managing borders while ensuring refugee protection; addressing the different needs of people on the move; strengthening the integration of refugees, migrants, stateless people and minorities; developing legal migration opportunities, and preventing trafficking and protecting the victims, especially children.

The participating countries adopted the "Almaty Declaration". The importance of the Declaration lies in its proposal to create a regional framework, which would serve as a platform for further cooperation, dialogue and follow up action. In this regard, partnerships at the national, regional and international level need to be fostered with a view of strengthened coordination and cooperation. Building on already existing structures, the conference and its follow-up, in particular the implementation of recommendations - may in the future be referred to as the "Almaty Process", with specific focus on capacity building.

This conference was the fifth in a series of regional gatherings on refugee protection and international migration. The others were held in Yemen (May 2008), Senegal (November 2008), Costa Rica (November 2009) and Tanzania (September 2010).