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**REPORT** of the **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
on the **SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN**  
**REFUGEES** to **SUPPORT VOLUNTARY**  
**REPATRIATION, SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION**  
and **ASSISTANCE TO HOST COUNTRIES**

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2-3 May 2012  
Geneva, Switzerland

**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
and Assistance to Host Countries  
2-3 May 2012, Geneva, Switzerland**

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**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
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2-3 May 2012, Geneva, Switzerland**

Conference Report

***Executive Summary***

The Conference was attended by 47 governments and 30 intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and other entities [see Annex 2 – *List of Participants*]. It welcomed the multi-year, Solutions Strategy for Afghan refugees as a timely and useful roadmap that sought to address protection and durable solutions for Afghan refugees through regional and international cooperation, in a spirit of burden-sharing. Following the presentation of national strategies by the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, there were 25 interventions in plenary session. Participants then formed working groups to exchange ideas on three cross-cutting themes: 1) voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration; 2) capacity building: skills, education and vocational training; and 3) partnerships linking development and humanitarian actors, and community-based approaches. In conclusion of its work, the Conference adopted a joint communiqué expressing support for the Solutions Strategy, highlighting its importance as an integrated framework for multilateral cooperation and coordination.

In view of the broad support for the Solutions Strategy, the quadripartite process involving the three countries of the region and UNHCR is expected to establish a follow-up implementation mechanism. Many participating governments also emphasized the need to link the Afghanistan specific components of the Strategy to the Tokyo Conference, scheduled in July 2012.



International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Opening Session. UNHCR Photo / Sirisome Sisomsack

## Summary of proceedings

The Conference was opened by the Government of Switzerland, as host. Following the adoption of the agenda, a short film was shown on the situation of Afghan refugees and returnees in the three countries. The Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Didier Burkhalter, welcomed the participants and called for international support for the Solutions Strategy, underlining the importance of burden-sharing and of development aid to address the roots of poverty in Afghanistan. [see Annex 3. A – *Statement by the Swiss Federal Councillor*]



International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Opening Session. UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expressed appreciation to the Swiss Government as host of the Conference, and to the three governments of the region for having developed the Solutions Strategy. Recalling the protracted nature of the Afghan refugee situation and the generous hospitality of the host Governments for over three decades, the High Commissioner reiterated the need for international solidarity and burden-sharing. He appealed for multi-year international support to address durable solutions for Afghan refugees, by creating conditions for their return and reintegration in Afghanistan through community-based development activities and support to host countries. [see Annex 3. b – *Remarks by the High Commissioner*]

In his opening statement, Mr. Michael Keating, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, spoke of the Solutions Strategy as catalytic in bringing humanitarian and development aid together through area-based approaches. Creating livelihood opportunities and building capacities at local level were essential to make assistance effective. He affirmed that the UN system in Afghanistan was ready to work with diverse actors in the implementation of the Strategy. [see Annex 3. c – *Remarks by the DSRSG for Afghanistan*]

The keynote speech was presented by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, former UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan. Recalling his long experience working on Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi said that the



Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, delivering the keynote speech. UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré



efforts of the past years to assist Afghanistan had failed mainly in the areas of security, governance and rebuilding the rule of law. He listed seven areas where mistakes had been made, and stressed that a political settlement was required to end the conflict and pave the way for sustained peace, from which the Solutions Strategy would benefit greatly. He appealed for continued international support to the millions of people who deserved to be part of the national reconstruction efforts, as well as to host countries whose communities had hosted millions of refugees over decades. [see Annex 3. d – *Keynote Address*]

The three governments of the region presented their country strategies [Annex 4], highlighting the protracted nature of the Afghan refugee situation, and the impact and cost of hosting refugees for over three decades. They each emphasized the need for continued support and international burden-sharing, reaffirming that voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution and underscoring the importance of community-level investments in the regions of high returns in Afghanistan to pave the way for sustainable reintegration.

### ***Plenary Interventions***

The plenary sessions were chaired by Ambassador Manuel Bessler, Vice-Director, Delegate for humanitarian aid and head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit. Following the presentation of the country strategies, the floor was then opened to interventions. In total, 25 statements<sup>1</sup> were made welcoming the Solutions Strategy, and recalling the importance of regional and international cooperation and multi-sectoral coordination. Many praised the engagement of the three governments in devising this multi-year Strategy. Most of the speakers welcomed its emphasis on the need to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development activities and the importance of bringing development aid to community-levels. Overall economic growth and job creation were recognized as important for Afghanistan's future by many governments and development agencies.



Ambassador Manuel Bessler, Vice-Director, Delegate for humanitarian aid and head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA). UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

While welcoming the regional framework, a few delegations insisted on the need to clarify the next steps, including funding mechanisms, and noted the importance of national ownership and commitment, the involvement of civil societies and the inclusion of women and children in the implementation of the Solutions Strategy.

The Government of Afghanistan had highlighted in its country strategy that the Solutions Strategy was already integrated into the Afghan National Priority Programs (NPPs), and that efforts were continuing to mainstream refugee issues into the Afghan national strategy. Participants encouraged the Afghan government to use this integrated approach as basis for the Government Self Reliance Strategy to be presented at the Tokyo Conference in July 2012.

Some governments also mentioned the importance of addressing secondary displacement and the increasing number of IDPs, which were not included in the Strategy. Urbanization was highlighted as a growing problem that was frequently underestimated. One government welcomed the regional approach to border management.

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<sup>1</sup> Interventions were presented by: Denmark, Japan, United States, Turkey, Germany, UAE, EU, Norway, China, Canada, The Netherlands, Kenya, Sweden, Australia, Italy, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, India, Bangladesh, Korea, ECO, WFP, ILO, UNODC and ACBAR.

Many delegates touched upon the importance of international burden-sharing and maintaining asylum space. A few speakers mentioned the need for a two-pronged approach: maintaining asylum space while working to create conditions for voluntary returns. Some countries mentioned resettlement as a solution that should be pursued.

Two governments expressed their expectation that the regional and multi-sectoral approach of the Solutions Strategy, which they welcomed, could be replicated in protracted refugee situations elsewhere.

### ***Working Group Discussions***

Some 200 participants divided into three working groups, and engaged in open discussions on cross-cutting themes. Each Working Group was co-chaired by a government of the region and a supporting government, assisted by a rapporteur from an international organization: Working Group 1 – Afghanistan/United States/UNHCR; Working Group 2 – Islamic Republic of Iran/Germany/IOM; Working Group 3 – Pakistan/Japan/UNDP. The supporting government co-chair then presented the summary of discussions in plenary the following day. [see Annex 5 – *Outcome of the Working Groups*]

### ***Adoption of the Joint Communiqué***

At the invitation of the Chair, Sweden presented the draft Joint Communiqué. While participants expressed overall agreement and endorsement of the Joint Communiqué, some comments were put forward on paragraphs 4, 6, and 10. The Conference then adopted the Joint Communiqué with the inclusion of “UN system” in paragraph 12.

In the closing session, the three governments expressed their appreciation of the wide support of the Solutions Strategy, and of the recognition of the challenges facing the host countries. The High Commissioner again commended the combined action of the three governments in tackling complex issues, and the clear commitment of the international community to voluntary repatriation. In conclusion, the High Commissioner emphasized the need to strengthen links between humanitarian assistance and sustainable development from a community perspective, and observed that this Conference was just the beginning of the process. The Solutions Strategy offered a framework for the Quadripartite Steering Committee to include Afghan refugees in the overall development strategy of Afghanistan, and to mobilize resources for its implementation. It was not, however, a substitute for the critical need for all stakeholders to find a political solution to end the conflict in Afghanistan. He added that the returnees of today should not become the economic migrants of tomorrow.

The Swiss host and the Chair thanked the participants and UNHCR for their contributions, and declared the adjournment of the Conference.



International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Opening Session. UNHCR Photo / Sirisome Sisomsack

## **Joint Communiqué**

### **of the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries**

**3 May 2012**

1) The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have hosted millions of Afghan refugees for more than three decades. During the last 10 years, over 5.7 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan, constituting nearly a quarter of the current Afghan population. There are still approximately three million registered Afghan refugees in neighboring Pakistan (nearly two million) and Iran (nearly one million), making this one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world. This situation requires continued efforts to facilitate voluntary repatriation and support to reintegration in Afghanistan.

2) The Governments of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have embarked on a quadripartite consultation process, resulting in the development of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries", hereinafter referred to as the "Solutions Strategy", and organizing this international conference.

3) On 2 and 3 May 2012, the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries was held in Geneva, co-hosted by the Government of Switzerland and UNHCR.

4) The Conference participants welcomed and supported the Solutions Strategy as an integrated framework for multilateral cooperation and coordination.

5) The Conference participants recognized that the implementation of the three pillars of this strategy, namely the continued support to voluntary repatriation, investment in sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan and assistance to host countries, will require the coordinated engagement of humanitarian and development actors and Governments concerned, underpinned by a commitment to sustained and tangible support by the international community.

6) In a number of recent international and regional conferences and meetings on Afghanistan, such as the Istanbul Conference, the facilitation of the voluntary and dignified repatriation of Afghan refugees has been reaffirmed. In these Conferences, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. In this context, the Conference participants recognized that the continued voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of the Afghan refugee population is one of the important elements to the overall stability and sustainable development of Afghanistan.

7) The Conference participants recognized the need to enhance the development and reintegration potential of high return communities in Afghanistan, particularly in the sectors of livelihood, basic services and shelter, in order to create communities that are viable in the long-term, which will help returnees remain in Afghanistan and support the increased return of refugees from the host

countries. These efforts should also help to reduce the pressure on Afghans to leave the country in search of livelihood opportunities.

8) The Conference participants recognized the central importance of bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance and sustainable development and welcomed the enhanced coordination and partnerships that are being created within the framework of the Solutions Strategy. The Conference participants also recognized the need to coordinate development and humanitarian assistance and channel development resources to support the implementation of this strategy.

9) The Conference participants recognized the continued economic and social costs as well as the environmental impact on Iran and Pakistan by this protracted situation and reaffirmed the importance of international burden-sharing. The Conference participants appreciated the generous contribution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in hosting millions of Afghan refugees over the past three decades. In the spirit of burden-sharing the international community reaffirmed its commitment to support the humanitarian needs of Afghan refugees and affected host communities in these countries.

10) The Conference participants reaffirmed their respect for the voluntary nature of refugee repatriation.

11) The Conference participants further highlighted the importance of the quadripartite consultative process that led to the development of the Solutions Strategy and expressed their full support for the continuance of this process through the Quadripartite Steering Committee that will guide the implementation of the Solutions Strategy.

12) Finally, the Conference participants acknowledged the positive role played by UNHCR and its partners in addressing the Afghan refugee situation and the support provided by the international community. The Conference participants also recognized the need to work with UNHCR and the UN system to resolve the protracted Afghan refugee situation.



**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
and Assistance to Host Countries**  
  
2-3 May 2012  
Geneva, Switzerland  
(Centre International de Conférences Genève - CICG)

**Agenda**

**Wednesday, 2 May**

**09:00-09:45** Check-in/collection of Conference ID and welcoming coffee

**Morning Session**

**10:00-13:00**

- CICG, Room 1 **I. Opening of the conference**
- II. Adoption of the agenda**
- III. Film on “The Solutions Strategy”**
- IV. Statement by the Swiss Federal Councillor**
- V. Remarks by the High Commissioner, and  
The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan**
- VI. Keynote Address**
- VII. Presentation of country strategies**
- VIII. Plenary Interventions**

**13:00-15:00** Lunch break

**Afternoon Session**

**15:00-16:00**

CICG, Room 1 **VIII. Plenary Interventions (cont’d)**

**16:00 -18:00** Working Groups – Centre de Conférences de Varembé (CCV), opposite the CICG

CCV, Room A Working group 1 - Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration  
[Co-Chairs: Afghanistan & USA, Rapporteur: UNHCR]

CCV, Room B Working group 2 - Capacity building: skills, education and vocational training  
[Co-Chairs: Islamic Republic of Iran & Germany, Rapporteur: IOM]

CCV, Room C Working group 3 - Partnership with development and humanitarian actors and community-based approaches  
[Co-Chairs: Pakistan & Japan, Rapporteur: UNDP]

**18:00**  
CICG Cafeteria, 1st floor Reception hosted by the Swiss Confederation

## Thursday, 3 May

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**9:30-10:00** Coffee

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### Morning Session

**10:00-12:00 IX.**

CICG, Room 1

#### **Report back to plenary on the working groups**

- (a) Working group 1 - Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration
- (b) Working group 2 - Capacity building: skills, education and vocational training
- (c) Working group 3 - Partnership with development and humanitarian actors and community-based approaches
- (d) Comments from the floor

**12:00- 13:00 X.**

#### **Final remarks and closing of the conference**

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**14:00**

Palais des Nations,

Press Room III

Press Conference

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8 May 2012  
English/French

**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees,  
to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
and Assistance to Host Countries**

Geneva, 2 – 3 May 2012

**Conférence internationale sur la Stratégie de solutions  
pour les réfugiés afghans visant à appuyer le rapatriement librement consenti,  
la réintégration durable et l’assistance aux pays hôtes**

Genève, 2-3 mai 2012

**List of participants**

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**Liste des participants**

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## I. GOVERNMENTS - GOUVERNEMENTS

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Mr. Abdul Samad HAMI  
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Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation

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Mr. Shafiq QARIZADA  
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Mr. Mohammad Yousof ITIBAR  
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## Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Conférence internationale sur la Stratégie de solutions pour les réfugiés afghans

### **Déclaration de la Suisse en séance plénière**

# **« Réduire l'écart entre la condition humaine et la dignité »**

Genève, le 2 mai 2012

Prononcée par S.E. Didier Burkhalter  
Conseiller fédéral  
Département fédéral des affaires étrangères

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Seule la version prononcée fait foi



Messieurs les Ministres,

Monsieur le Haut Commissaire,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Bienvenue en Suisse et à Genève ! Bienvenue, tout particulièrement, aux délégations de l'Afghanistan, de l'Iran et du Pakistan, trois pays qui ont uni leurs efforts à ceux du Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies; et cela pour développer une véritable stratégie de solutions en faveur d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants qui sont devenus les réfugiés afghans. Au nom de la Suisse, je salue également l'ensemble des participants et les remercie chaleureusement de venir ainsi témoigner de leur solidarité à la cause de ces réfugiés et des populations hôtes.

Aujourd'hui, dans ce Centre international de conférence, ici en Suisse, ce qui nous occupe peut paraître bien loin. En fait, ce qui nous occupe nous concerne tous : c'est la condition humaine, c'est une grande souffrance humaine. Et la dimension de cette souffrance est énorme : 2,7 millions de réfugiés enregistrés et presque autant qui ne le sont pas ; des millions d'êtres humains qui vivent depuis des décennies au Pakistan et en Iran. A ce nombre s'ajoutent encore un demi-million de personnes déplacées à l'intérieur de l'Afghanistan. Aujourd'hui, tout au long de cette conférence, ce sont les destinées de ces personnes que nous devons avoir à l'esprit et dans le cœur : 5,5 millions d'êtres humains qui ont dû quitter leur foyer.

Votre présence à tous, Mesdames et Messieurs, est aussi une preuve de confiance ; de la confiance que vous accordez aux institutions internationales et aussi à la Suisse qui a l'honneur d'être l'Etat hôte des ces institutions. La Suisse, mon pays, se réjouit de ce rôle d'accueil et de contribuer à cet élan commun, à la recherche de solutions durables basées sur le partage de la responsabilité. Comme en témoignent les crises récentes, il est primordial de pouvoir mobiliser largement les Etats et les organisations pour soutenir l'action humanitaire internationale. Là aussi, l'union fait la force, l'intégration des différents types d'aide, de l'humanitaire pur au développement, en passant par la promotion de la paix.

La stratégie proposée dans le document de conférence s'inscrit dans le cadre d'un processus de longue haleine entre les trois Etats concernés. Elle aborde la question des déplacements de la population de manière complète et intelligente ; elle met en évidence des interventions concrètes dans un environnement terriblement complexe. Par exemple, la promotion du rapatriement volontaire en favorisant les investissements dans les zones de retour ; ou, encore, le maintien de l'espace d'asile dans les pays hôtes en renforçant le soutien apporté aux communautés d'accueil.

A cet égard, on ne saurait construire solidement que sur la durée : il est nécessaire que la communauté internationale s'engage à long terme dans cette stratégie inclusive. Il est primordial de mobiliser durablement les trois gouvernements de la région, le HCR, la communauté des donateurs ainsi que les autres acteurs impliqués, dans l'humanitaire et le développement.

L'exode massif de réfugiés afghans depuis 1978 – un tiers de siècle ! - a eu des effets multiples, notamment sur les pays voisins et leurs populations. D'ailleurs, sait-on suffisamment, lorsque l'on en parle dans des pays comme la Suisse, que 80% des réfugiés dans le monde (soit quelque 35 millions de personnes) sont accueillis dans des pays en développement ? Sait-on suffisamment que ces pays, qui ne sont pas riches, montrent ainsi une richesse de générosité qui va bien au-delà de leurs moyens, qui n'a que bien peu de frontières ? Au nom de nous tous ici, je tiens à saluer et à remercier l'Iran et le Pakistan, qui ont largement ouverts leurs portes et leur pays à des millions de personnes en détresse. Avec l'appui du HCR et de ses partenaires, ces pays offrent de la protection et de l'assistance depuis plus de trois décennies à une population en exil.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Le HCR ne peut résoudre seul le problème des personnes déplacées et des réfugiés afghans. Des efforts plus larges sont indispensables, notamment pour répondre aux besoins de ceux qui rentrent au pays, qui rentrent en Afghanistan. Cette conférence de Genève met en évidence ce point fondamental : les solutions ne doivent plus être envisagées de manière partielle. Elles sont globales et elles sont l'affaire de tous.

Il est aussi nécessaire de renforcer la sécurité humaine en Afghanistan ; la sécurité humaine dans toutes ses dimensions, bien au-delà du dialogue humanitaire, en visant à coordonner des mesures d'assistance matérielle et financière. La sécurité humaine a inspiré la stratégie car elle inclut à la fois la politique humanitaire, le développement, la paix et les droits de l'homme. C'est cette approche intégrée qui donne le plus de chance de réussir. Ainsi, renforcer la sécurité humaine nécessite notamment de s'en prendre aux racines de la pauvreté. C'est pour cela que le rôle des acteurs du développement est fondamental.

Le développement de l'Afghanistan est donc un défi de longue haleine, qui aura besoin d'institutions étatiques solides et d'un dialogue inclusif et ouvert. Ce dialogue et cette coopération devront aussi être poursuivis et renforcés avec les partenaires des pays voisins et avec la communauté internationale.

Dans cette perspective, la Suisse salue le processus de réconciliation et d'intégration nationale en Afghanistan qui représente un pas important, un geste indispensable, vers un État stable et indépendant.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Vous allez vous mettre maintenant au travail. Durant ces prochaines heures, vous aurez l'occasion de passer en revue la stratégie proposée conjointement par les trois pays directement concernés et de saisir le potentiel qu'elle peut apporter à la région. Vous devrez vous montrer flexibles concernant la mise en œuvre des solutions élaborées dans la Stratégie en tenant compte des spécificités de la région. Ce document, dont l'existence est en soi un début de succès, doit être considéré comme une base de discussion pour la communauté internationale. Comme un tremplin vers un réel – et possible – progrès pour les êtres humains concernés.

Quels que soient les obstacles, la concrétisation des solutions durables proposées dans la stratégie constitue un élément capital pour la stabilité de la région. En clair : pour le rapatriement librement consenti et la réintégration des réfugiés afghans au sein de leurs communautés d'origine ainsi que pour renforcer l'assistance aux pays hôtes.

Nous devons encore développer un plan de mise en œuvre cohérent de cette stratégie afin d'harmoniser les interventions avec les processus déjà engagés sur le terrain (tels que les Programmes de priorités nationales ou la Stratégie de développement nationale de l'Afghanistan).

Les solutions durables ne doivent pas se concurrencer. Elles doivent être mises sur un pied d'égalité. Ainsi, des mesures suffisantes de soutien doivent être développées dans les pays de premier asile comme dans les zones de retour, afin de faciliter l'accès au logement, au travail, à la protection sociale et aux services de base. Pour éviter d'exacerber les tensions sociales, ces mesures devront par ailleurs intégrer les communautés locales (d'accueil ou d'origine), dans la mesure où leurs difficultés – leurs situations de vie - sont comparables à celles des réfugiés ou des rapatriés.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

La Suisse contribue aux efforts de la communauté internationale en Afghanistan et continuera à le faire au-delà de 2014, notamment par la présence et le travail de son bureau de coopération au développement à Kaboul. Nous sommes heureux que l'engagement civil de la Suisse apporte un soutien concret à celles et ceux qui en ont besoin, aux populations vulnérables, par des actions directes, des réponses à de nouvelles crises, des programmes de développement et des contributions financières et en personnel à nos partenaires multilatéraux (comme le PAM, le HCR, le CICR et l'UNICEF).

Nos priorités, dans la coopération suisse, sont aussi simples qu'utiles : améliorer la vie, ce qu'il y a de plus précieux ; améliorer la vie des Afghans et des autres populations concernées, en particulier grâce au développement des zones paysannes, grâce à la reconstruction, grâce à une meilleure gouvernance locale également.

La réinstallation des réfugiés, en tant que solution durable, fait également partie des instruments de la protection internationale et reste une question d'actualité pour la Suisse. Conformément à sa tradition humanitaire et bien qu'aucun quota ne soit actuellement en vigueur dans notre pays, la Suisse accueille des groupes de réfugiés vulnérables en partenariat avec le HCR.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est maintenant le début d'une conférence. C'est surtout le début de deux jours, deux journées partagées, deux journées consacrées à s'engager ensemble pour un avenir meilleur ; celui d'enfants, de femmes et d'hommes qui forment une population particulièrement vulnérable. Nous le leur devons, comme nous le devons aux pays voisins, qui ont fait la preuve de leur solidarité. Nous le devons, afin de réduire l'écart entre la condition humaine et la dignité.

Opening Remarks by António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries**

Distinguished Co-Chair,  
Honourable Members of  
Government, Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start by  
thanking Counselor  
Burkhalter and the Swiss  
Federal Department of  
Foreign Affairs for their  
work in hosting this  
conference. I also wish to  
convey special appreciation  
to Mr. Brahimi, for agreeing  
to share his insight, wisdom



António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.  
UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

and experience on this complex and difficult situation. I would also like to acknowledge the cooperation and concerted efforts of the governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, and to commend them on the unique consultative approach that has led to the development of the **Solutions Strategy**.

Afghan refugees constitute the largest, and the longest-standing refugee situation in the history of UNHCR with some 3 million residing in Pakistan and Iran. Almost 80% of this population has been in exile for over twenty years and comprise youth who have never seen Afghanistan. Over the past 3 decades the Afghan refugee situation has continued to evolve, both in nature and scope. In tandem with large scale voluntary repatriation, there has been continued displacement both within Afghanistan, and beyond its borders. In some cases, displacement is no longer only resulting from conflict but a variety of factors, including drought, have left some 500,000 Afghans internally displaced. The situation remains dynamic, with continued insecurity in parts of Afghanistan while in stable areas conditions for sustainable reintegration and development remains a challenge.

We are in an important period of transition in Afghanistan that is characterized by uncertainty. While the international community continues its effort to support the nation building process in



Afghanistan we should recognize that Afghan refugees and returnees constitute critical human capital in this process. As such, we should ensure that they are factored in and given every opportunity to be part of this endeavor. Afghan refugees have shown that they “vote with their feet” when conditions for return are conducive, they have always wished to go home. Therefore, we have a collective responsibility to support and facilitate their legitimate aspirations. The ability for refugees to return in safety and dignity and become productive citizens in their communities upon return is also integral to the stability and progress of Afghanistan.

The Solutions Strategy comes at a crucial moment in this context. It is an innovative multi-year strategy that acknowledges the realities on the ground and attempts to link multi-lateral efforts towards solutions for refugees. This is a road map that provides a predictable course of action and agreed upon goals - which are essential during this period of transition. This predictability is imperative not only for UNHCR, but also for the three States most directly affected, the international community and, not least, for uprooted Afghans and their host communities.

In the ten years of UNHCR’s largest voluntary repatriation program, we have assisted over 4.6 million of the estimated 5.7 million Afghans who have returned. But the rate of return has declined over the past 3 years, from a high of over a quarter of a million refugees repatriating per year to some 70,000 last year. Upon return, the majority have difficulty accessing livelihoods, essential services and basic resources, such as land and water, compared to Afghans who never left.

Despite the large number of returns comprising almost a quarter of Afghanistan’s population, there are still nearly 3 million registered Afghan refugees, some 2 million in Pakistan and 1 million in Iran. In addition to these registered refugees, the principle countries of asylum continue to bear the burden of an estimated 2.5 million undocumented Afghans who move seeking livelihood opportunities. The movement of Afghans is a phenomenon that is also evident beyond the sub region, in 2011 Afghans constituted the largest number of individual asylum seekers globally – reaching as far as Australia.

When one looks at progress made in the last decade and the challenges remaining ahead to facilitate lasting solutions for Afghan refugees, one thing is clear. Durable solutions for refugees and creating conditions for sustainable return and reintegration do not lie within the scope of humanitarian action alone. It requires political and economic developments impacting on governance and rule of law, security, and economic opportunities. These are not within UNHCR’s mandate but UNHCR can play a catalytic role to engage all competent actors to ensure that these dividends are tangible at the community level. I believe that this collective investment will enable durable solutions for refugees and ensure that refugees of the past do not become migrants of the future.

In recognition of these contemporary realities and acknowledging the need to reinvigorate our efforts to seek solutions for Afghan refugees, a quadripartite consultative process was begun in May last year between the three government of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and UNHCR to

develop a multi-year strategy with a focus on three elements: voluntary repatriation; sustainable reintegration; and support to host countries. The strategy underscores the point that traditional humanitarian action and resources alone will not provide an effective response. Without significant, community based development activities, sustainable solutions for refugees will not be found, and an increasing number of Afghans may move further afield. We must create conditions that have a tangible impact on returnees and their communities and refugees and communities who continue to host them.

Both Iran and Pakistan have, for three decades now, each hosted millions of Afghans. This has meant sharing land and other natural resources, as well as providing access to medical care and schools. The Governments of Pakistan and Iran and host communities continue to pay a high price and I thank them for this tremendous contribution. We must all recognize this and continue supporting these countries' generous asylum policy as a demonstration of international burden sharing and solidarity. In addition to this support, **the international community needs to reaffirm its commitment to the voluntary nature of refugee repatriation and the principle of asylum for those refugees who cannot yet return to Afghanistan.**

The solutions strategy sets out a framework reflecting the collective pursuit of solutions. A key aspect of this collective effort focuses on ensuring sustainable development at the community level. The programs for the three countries are different according to context, yet have common features.

In Afghanistan, for example, 49 pilot sites in 19 high return provinces have been identified for targeted interventions in areas such as shelter, social services, employment and food security. Key line ministries have been involved in the process from the outset and have embedded these priorities in the National Priority Programs (NPPs) of Afghanistan. In addition to national and bi-lateral development actors, private sector engagement will be sought. Local endorsement at pilot sites has been secured through consultations with shuras, local leaders and government officials.

Efforts in Iran will support return and sustainable re-integration, including through a joint profiling of refugees in order to identify needs for targeted interventions. Continued support is also needed for the innovative health insurance scheme launched in 2011 which provides universal health coverage to all registered refugees. Projects will also focus on building the capacity and skills of Afghan refugees during their stay in Iran, such as through improved vocational training, so that their human capital will contribute more effectively to the development of Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, in line with the Government's Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees, the strategy focuses on voluntary repatriation, temporary management of Afghans and the expansion of the Refugee Affected and Refugee Hosting Area (RAHA) initiative. The RAHA approach is considered a best practice in coordinated delivery between government, humanitarian and development actors with its focus on host community programs in health, education, water and sanitation. Such programs, whether to enhance livelihood opportunities

or to restore environmentally degraded areas, are a tangible expression of international solidarity that serve to alleviate the pressure on hosting communities and promote co-existence between groups.

The programs in Iran and Pakistan recognize that for return to be durable, in particular where capital assets such as land and housing are not readily available, refugees must possess social assets, such as education and vocational skills. This investment in turn contributes to the nation building process of Afghanistan.

I will leave it to the countries concerned to go into more detail about their proposed strategies, but I ask all of you to bring your creativity and experience to the working group discussions so that we approach these issues in the constructive and bold manner required. The *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* should also be acknowledged as a beginning of a process and the role of the Quadripartite Steering Committee to coordinate the implementation of the strategy is a significant development. The strategy also provides an integrated framework for strengthening partnerships and multi-lateral cooperation which are essential components for the synergies needed for success in this endeavor.

In the final analysis, this *Solutions Strategy* sets out a road map initially over the next 3 years for collective action towards securing sustainable solutions for Afghan refugees. I believe this gathering provides the opportunity to recognize the importance of this process and commit the full support of the international community to the strategy.

It is my sincere hope that our collective efforts will ultimately continue to make a difference in the lives and aspirations of the people we care for – the millions of Afghan refugees hoping for a better future!

## **International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries**

Opening Remarks by Michael Keating  
Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan

Distinguished Representatives from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan,  
High Commissioner, colleagues from the international community,  
My UN colleagues and from NGOs and civil society,

First, let me begin by congratulating the three governments involved for articulating this strategy and for UNHCR for having facilitated this process.

Clearly, it is high time that the situation facing refugees in Pakistan and Iran is brought to international attention for many reasons. One of them being the burden they can represent to the communities and authorities which host them which is too often forgotten.

This conference is already achieving a result just by taking place and it is very timely as plans for transition are unfolding, and a number of important conferences are about to take place -- Chicago and of course Tokyo. As the High Commissioner said, key issue now is to reduce the many uncertainties facing the people and Government of Afghanistan. This Solutions Strategy can be an important part in reducing some of those uncertainties. There is no point in drawing attention to the situation of refugees and of the countries which are supporting them, unless solutions are also articulated, and this is what is so important about the document that you have before you and about this whole initiative. It is excellent that so much work has gone into the Afghan end of this strategy, led by the Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, and supported by UNHCR, and indeed the whole UN country team in Afghanistan, including UNDP particularly on livelihood, but also other organizations such as ILO.

This strategy, in fact, is catalyzing thinking and planning around how best to create the conditions, particularly economic opportunities and jobs that will encourage refugees to return, recognizing of course that host communities must also benefit from the Solutions Strategy.

I visit communities from which refugees and IDPs have fled and it goes without saying that conditions facing people in Afghanistan whether in rural areas or peri-urban areas are very tough. This does raise one question: how, after ten years of development interventions and so much money being spend on development, can so many people still live in terrible conditions, with 55 per cent of children under five stunted. At least one third of the population is living under the poverty line. Despite the extraordinary progress that has been made over the last ten years in many domains, including infrastructure, health and education, conditions do remain tough and there are a number of serious problems including corruption, land ownership, access to services, jobs and so on.

The strategy is highlighting some of the challenges and indeed the shortcomings in current efforts, to strengthen livelihood opportunities, job creation and access to services in Afghanistan, and how we work together to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Let me just mention some of the impediments it is highlighting. Of course of one is how to bring the humanitarian and development agendas together, to increase the resilience of communities and opportunities to address the development deficit. Too often, humanitarian tools are being used to address essentially developmental problems. We have to find ways in which to close this gap. We also have to find ways in which we can strengthen area based approaches, how to support local capacities, whether in civil society or communities themselves or local government, and indeed of national government.

Another challenge is how to engage the extraordinary entrepreneurship of Afghans themselves? They are hugely entrepreneurial, but opportunities need to be created for that entrepreneurship to be geared to creating jobs and economic activity. And how to improve coordination? -- both among local actors on the ground, among the international community, within the governments and indeed between all these various constituencies. This is another challenge that is being highlighted by the Solutions Strategy.

And all this is particularly important at a time when, in keeping with the Paris principles, the Government of Afghanistan is seeking true and meaningful alignment of the international community behind its development strategy, behind the National Priority Programmes, and is encouraging all its partners to increase their support, through the national budget and systems. There are clear capacity issues in doing this. But this is a clear political signal from the Government of Afghanistan, and one to which all of you have subscribed at the international level. The challenge is how to make that happen in the context of Afghanistan and how the Solutions Strategy can contribute to aligned and on-budget assistance.

So while the Strategy's primary beneficiaries are the refugees themselves, it can also serve as a catalyst for more coherent approaches to local development. And in doing so, it needs to fit in with and support national development plans in the Afghan context. We are all aware that the strategy is not without risks and many impediments. This includes of course uncertainty about the future, which will influence decisions to return.

Ideally, we need momentum behind the peace process, a structured peace process. We do not have that. We need that to accompany transition, not least as transformation looms. Security remains a major issue, not just security from violence, but as our Swiss colleague said, human security as well. Capacities at the local level to implement programmes that will support local communities is also an issue, and uneven coordination as I have mentioned, and of course, there is also the challenge of securing sufficient funding for the National Development Plan and indeed for those aspects of it that support the Solutions Strategy. These impediments need to be addressed and mitigated and they can be. Support for this strategy should be whole hearted but it must be based upon realism about this roadblocks. It can add momentum to the broad effort to address the roadblocks.

It must retain a degree of flexibility and responsiveness to events and to the lessons we are learning as we are implementing the strategy, particularly for example, from the first 22 sites which have been selected.

Let me conclude by saying that the UN system in Afghanistan is willing to engage and already working with civil society and NGOs to support this Strategy, to maximize the opportunities that it represents and to help address some the impediments that might affect its progress. And success will bring benefits, not only to the countries that have generously hosted Afghan refugees, but also for Afghanistan and of course for refugees themselves, whose own determination is critical to its achievement. Ultimately, if this strategy helps the people of Afghanistan -- the refugees, the men, the women and the children already in country, and those who will come back -- it will be an extraordinary achievement, and therefore I hope you will put your support behind it.

Thank you.

International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
and Assistance to Host Countries

**Keynote Speech**  
**By Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi**

2 May 2012, Geneva

Federal Councilor Burkhalter,  
High Commissioner,  
Excellences,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply grateful to you, High Commissioner, for inviting me to this very important and very timely Conference. It is an honour indeed and such a pleasure to see familiar faces from the past and to know that, in this distinguished audience, many have, at one point or another, participated in the collective effort to support the people of Afghanistan as they courageously struggle to restore peace and bring stability and development to their country and dignity to their people.

I left Afghanistan more than eight years ago and the United Nations two years later. But does one really leave either Afghanistan or the United Nations?

When I was still in both, I used to tell people that the UN and Afghanistan had at least one thing in common – *tribalism*. And that I was not sure which, of the two, was the more tribal.

But let me hasten to add that UNHCR has been, and continues to be, one of my favourite United Nations Tribes. I have long admired the creativity of their leadership, the dedication and professionalism of staff, and the manner in which in these days of financial crunch, they strive to do more with less, as they work, round the clock and around the world, to provide for the needs of millions of people.

In conflict situations, UNHCR people are often the first to arrive and the last to leave, if they do leave at all. With Afghan refugees, they have been engaged now for well over 30 years. And naturally, Pakistan and Iran were, and continue to be, close partners on that job as those two countries hosted the overwhelming majority of Afghan refugees and continue to do so.

Today, you have gathered here to address that long-standing and multi-faceted humanitarian problem of the Afghan refugees and returnees who account, I believe for roughly a quarter of the total population of Afghanistan.

Allow me, at this stage, to warmly congratulate the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan for coming together in this project to work closely with UNHCR on the Afghan refugee problem and all the many related issues. And allow me also, to express my appreciation, my admiration and my congratulations to High Commissioner Guterres and his colleagues in UNHCR for their initiative and their successful facilitation of the process.

But of course the hard, patient work lies ahead: for this undertaking to be successful, the four partners need the sustained attention and support of all of you present in this conference.

I served twice in Afghanistan: from July 1997 to October 1999 as Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations and again, immediately after 9/11 2001 till January 2004 as Special Representative of the Secretary General, Chair of the Bonn Conference and Head of the UNAMA – the United Nations Assistant Mission in Afghanistan.

When dealing with such a complex situation as the one prevailing in Afghanistan, it is necessary to be fully aware of the past, to have an accurate knowledge of the present and to develop a vision of the future which is both realistic and ambitious.

All I can contribute to your deliberations at this Conference is to share with you a few thoughts about my experience during those two missions and tell you of a few lessons I learned from our successes and failures during that time.

During my first mission in Afghanistan, it was particularly distressing to see that those millions of refugees, mainly in Pakistan and Iran had no prospect of returning home. On the contrary, each time the fighting intensified in their country, or the crops failed, more came across the border to increase their numbers.

The peoples and Governments of Pakistan and Iran cannot be thanked enough for their admirable sense of neighborly solidarity, their brotherly and generous hospitality, and all the sacrifices they made and continue to make to support the Afghan refugees on their soil and also to help, to the best of their ability, in the orderly and voluntary return of those refugees who wish to go back home again.

The specific needs of the Afghan Refugees and the unique role of Pakistan and Iran, as well as the other neighbours of Afghanistan were recognized time and again – the latest time being in the Communique of the Conference which was held in Bonn, in December 2001 to commemorate the tenth Anniversary of the Bonn Conference of 2001. Here is the paragraph devoted to the Refugees in that Communique: *“We acknowledge the burden of Afghanistan’s neighbours, in particular Pakistan and Iran, in providing temporary refuge to millions of Afghans in difficult times and are committed to further work towards their voluntary, safe and orderly return”*.

This commitment is fully consistent with the letter and spirit of the Agenda for Protection of 2002 if I remember well and the Convention Plus which speak, inter alia, of the need for the international community to share the burden of providing for the needs of refugees and IDPs and the host communities as fairly as possible. In this connection, I wish to recognize the patient and generous interest of many international donors who stayed on and helped the Afghan refugees during those challenging years.

As many in this distinguished audience will no doubt recall, the decade of the 90s was particularly difficult. I remember the visit Mrs. Sadako Ogata – a familiar name to many of you – made to Afghanistan in 2000, just before she left her position as High Commissioner. She saw from very close quarters how things were at a standstill politically and how, as she told me then, the world seemed to have forgotten about Afghanistan.

Of course, I knew very well, from my own experience what Mrs. Ogata meant: for two long years I had spoken again and again to every faction inside Afghanistan and to every Government in



every country where I thought there was some interest for Afghanistan. But we got nowhere. We kept going around in circles, the fighting continued and the people of Afghanistan were held hostage to those groups whose interest seemed to be in the continuation of the conflict, not in its solution.

The sad truth is that the international community did not consider then that Afghanistan was of much interest and that the world could live with what was described as *a low intensity conflict* in a remote, land-locked, poor country like Afghanistan.

In September 1999, I resigned and told a closed meeting of the Security Council that I was giving up because I felt I had no real support from them: I had the clear impression that the most influential members of the Council thought that now that the Cold War was over, Afghanistan was of no importance to them. I added that they were wrong however, because no conflict could be bottled up for ever within the borders of one country, no matter how small, no matter how poor and no matter how remote that country was. And that, sooner or later, that conflict was bound to spill over and affect many other countries and peoples.

Actually, the conflict in Afghanistan had already spilled over with the millions of refugees, mainly in Pakistan and Iran, but also in many other countries, from India to Germany and from Australia to Sweden.

Equally serious was the opium trade which was destroying the health of millions of young people around the world and criminalizing the economy of Afghanistan itself as well as that of many other countries. Remember, already in those days, somewhere around 75% of the hard drugs sold on the high streets of London or Berlin came from Afghanistan.

And need we recall how, neglecting Afghanistan the way it had been throughout the nineties ended up being even more costly with the attacks in New York and Washington on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001.

Of course, interest for Afghanistan immediately rose sky-high after 9/11. As we were preparing for the Bonn Conference immediately after those unprecedented attacks, I asked almost every one of the important players this simple and direct question: 9/11 is the direct consequence of the way in which the international community turned its back on Afghanistan after the Soviet Union withdrew from the country in 1989. Are you going to turn your back again on Afghanistan?

The answers I got from everyone seemed to indicate that the lesson had been learnt: the world shall not abandon Afghanistan again, I was assured.

Just under one year later, Sadako Ogata came to Kabul again, this time as the head of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). I accompanied her to Kandahar and one of the places we visited was a large camp for internally displaced people. It was particularly embarrassing for both of us to see that some of the millions of refugees who had enthusiastically returned from their refugee camps abroad could not reach their villages. Nor were they resettled elsewhere: the sad truth was that – yes – fighting had stopped but real peace and stability had not returned to the villages of those particular refugees who found themselves stranded in that IDP Camp.: their houses, their farms or their shops had been occupied by others during their absence and they had nowhere to go back to. Other returning refugees facing similar problems were not in IDP camps but in shantytowns that had mushroomed around Kabul and other Afghan cities.

UNHCR was supporting them with their usual dedication and courage. But what was needed to effectively help the returnees to be successfully reintegrated in their society could not be achieved by UNHCR alone. It was a shared responsibility of all those who had been given a role in the implementation of the Bonn process in the fields of security, governance and development – i.e. the Government of Afghanistan and all their partners who had agreed to work with them in the field of security, governance, and development.

Much has been achieved by the Afghan people and Government and their international partners. But they failed. **WE** failed in the important field of security and in the equally important field of institution building, especially the **Rule of Law**.

I have spoken publicly and frankly of the mistakes we all made in the process and will do so again, today, if I may – very briefly:

- 1) Those who met in Bonn in November/December 2001 were not fully representative of the rich variety of the people of Afghanistan. They, and us, were fully aware of that from the start and we thought all concerned would work to widen the popular base of the Bonn process as soon as we returned to Kabul. Our attempts were not inclusive enough and they were not successful. In particular, no serious effort was made to reach out to the Taliban.
- 2) It was necessary and possible to expand the field of activity of ISAF to cities other than Kabul. For that, ISAF needed to increase its strength from the 5000 men they started with to some 20,000. But that request fell on deaf ears.
- 3) The attention of key partners soon shifted away from Afghanistan to another country – Iraq.
- 4) Efforts to develop a credible and effective anti-drug policy were not successful – and still are not, I believe.
- 5) Corruption was allowed to take root and become the fast growing cancer it is today, partly fueled by large donations without due consideration to the need to help build administrative capacity and partly, it seems, by the huge drug industry.
- 6) Efforts to build a national Army and a Police Force were totally inadequate for many years.
- 7) The problems of the Justice System were first neglected and then poorly understood and addressed.

I think all these issues have been and are being addressed as may be seen, in particular, in the Final Communique of the Bonn Conference I quoted from a moment ago.

But the International Community was particularly slow to reach a consensus on the need and urgency of political negotiations to put an end to the various insurgencies. Even now, in many centres of influence, inside and outside of Afghanistan, there are voices who express doubts about the desirability of such a negotiation, skepticism about its feasibility, or fears about its consequences. Such doubts, skepticism and fears are understandable. I do not think they are justified.

Properly conceived and conducted such negotiations will not involve only the insurgents. They will also hear the concerns and aspirations of all the communities, and take full consideration of, all the political and social constituencies in the country. They will also mobilize the support of all Afghanistan's neighbours, including, of course, Pakistan and Iran.

An International Task Force that Ambassador Thomas Pickering and I co-chaired, found that such negotiations were both urgently needed and possible. We also said that such a process would benefit immensely from the commitment and support of Afghanistan's neighbours and near neighbours. Indeed, the full title of our report was: "***The Century Foundation: Negotiating Peace: Report of the International Task Force on Afghanistan in Its Regional and Multilateral Dimensions***". Naturally we saw a central role in this process for the United Nations.

Be that as it may, the Solutions Strategy this Conference is meeting to discuss and support would benefit greatly from a political settlement that would put an end to the fighting and open the way to real, sustained peace. The Strategy will also fit well with the aims of the *Transition* Afghanistan is now in, and with the objectives of the *Transformation Decade* the Government of Afghanistan and the International Community have solemnly committed themselves to work for and achieve.

It seems to me that what you will be debating here today and tomorrow is about people, about men and women and children, about all those millions who, through no fault of their own have been reduced for years to the condition of refugees and IDPs: they deserve to be helped to regain their rightful, legitimate place back in Afghanistan to participate in the national reconstruction effort; it is about those communities mainly, but not only, in Pakistan and Iran who accepted those millions in their midst and shared, and continue to share with them the little they have. And it is about the entire peoples of those neighbouring States who also deserve continued international recognition and burden-sharing for their role in providing refuge to those millions of affected people over several decades.

That is what this quadripartite process is about and that is why it needs the renewed commitment and generous support from the Governments and Organisations you represent.

I thank you again Mr. High Commissioner for inviting me and am also grateful to you all, Ladies and Gentlemen for your attention.

**Speech by H.E Dr. Jamaher Anwary, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Afghanistan.**

In the name of Allah, the most merciful and compassionate

Mr. Chairman

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, at the outset, I would very much like to thank Mr. Didier Burkhalter Federal Councillor of the Government of Switzerland, Mr. Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees and his representatives in the region who worked so hard to help make this conference a success, and finally all of you for attending this very important two day international conference aimed at seeking durable solutions for the protracted situation in which millions of Afghan refugees have spent over three decades in exile, mainly in Pakistan and Iran.

A special thanks to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi who has kindly agreed to be the key note speaker. His presence today among us, as well as all his hard work and dedication during his tenure in Afghanistan as Special Representative of the Secretary General is so much appreciated.



H.E Dr. Jamaher Anwary, Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Afghanistan.  
UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

Excellencies,

The return of nearly six million Afghans to their homeland since 2002, almost 25% of the current population of Afghanistan, has been a remarkable indication of the people's confidence in the country's future. Last year, 70,000 registered refugees repatriated from Pakistan and Iran. These six million returned home with the assistance of UNHCR and the governments in this region, making the Afghan voluntary repatriation programme the largest in the world.

Such a huge increase in the country's population in such a short time has definitely placed great pressure on the country's absorption capacity. We all know very well that the key to encouraging further repatriation, and also to stabilizing population movement, is economic and social development alongside peace and stability in Afghanistan. This concept is at the very heart of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan which was discussed in Dushanbe in March this year when the participants reiterated their determination to promote lasting confidence and partnership for the purpose of securing peace, stability and socio-economic progress in Afghanistan and the region. I am certain that during this conference, here in Geneva, you will reaffirm this determination and thereby reconfirm your support to Afghan refugees.

However, the volume of returns from both Iran and Pakistan has declined markedly in the last three years. This is understandable since the remaining refugees have been living outside their country for

more than three decades; reintegrating back into their homeland will require them to face many challenges after such a long period.

Since 2002, my Ministry, together with UNHCR, has built almost 220,000 houses for the most vulnerable returnees. We have constructed more than 10,000 water points and provided cash grants to assist 4.6 million returnees with their immediate needs. However, our joint contributions to the reintegration process have been rather modest to date, and much work remains to be done if the hopes of the remaining 2.7 million refugees still living in Iran and Pakistan are not to be disappointed.

Around 60 percent of all returned refugees continue to live below the standard of their fellow countrymen. They are struggling to find work; to provide housing for their families; to get medical care when needed; to enroll their children in school; and to find water that is safe to drink.

The scale and complexity of the challenges ahead require long term engagement. These cannot be addressed by humanitarian agencies and assistance alone. There is a need for a collective and comprehensive effort on the part of the Government which will need strong support for the national priority programmes that impact key reintegration challenges.

As I mentioned, there are more than 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees still living in Pakistan and Iran. My government is committed to helping those who want to return home. We continue to work closely with relevant ministries, UNHCR and other UN agencies to pave the way for returnees to return and successfully reintegrate. We are confident that many of our compatriots still in exile will come back home in future.

But while we continue supporting the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, we also need to get it right supporting those that have already returned. There are many reasons why repatriation and reintegration in Afghanistan has slowed down - conflicts in some parts of the country, food insecurity, scarcity of land and shelter, limited access to education and healthcare and above all, the need to be able to earn a proper living.

(This is why my government, together with our key partners, in the international community is revising its reintegration strategy to target communities in areas of high return. It reflects a transition from focusing on humanitarian emergency assistance to also providing long-term development assistance in order to ensure sustainable reintegration.

This approach will further enhance our capacity to assist Afghan returnees. It will create conditions conducive for their return - conditions which will help them get back on their feet, so that they don't have to leave the home they return to in search of work.

To help returning refugees reintegrate back into their former communities, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and UNHCR have been working the past 10 months to bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and long-term development assistance. Community-based interventions in provinces of high return are being identified. I hope that during today's discussion, you will endorse this regional approach aimed at voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and support to host countries as the beginning of a multi-year strategy for Afghan refugees in the region.

This strategy is not creating parallel structures, but is firmly in line with the Afghan National Development Strategy embodied in the National Priority Programmes. In February this year, I presented this strategy to the council of ministers which endorsed it. The President then directed them to support its implementation. To date, my Ministry has signed Memorandums of Understanding with several ministries clearly identifying their responsibilities in meeting the needs of returning Afghan refugees. Through this process my Government is positioning itself to discuss how these needs can be integrated into the National Priority Programs (NPPs) during the upcoming Tokyo Conference.

Excellencies,

The people and Governments of Iran and Pakistan have generously hosted Afghans over the past few decades, and we are very grateful for their hospitality. We also recognize the need for assisting host communities and to continue supporting voluntary repatriation.

We are happy to have worked so closely with the Governments of Iran and Pakistan to establish this -regional strategy, not only for those who have already returned home but also for those Afghans still living in these hosting countries.

My Government is looking forward to another very important conference being held in Ashgabat next week when all three of our countries will join the rest of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to discuss for the very first time enhancing protection of refugees in the Muslim World, and enhancing multi-lateral cooperation in resolving refugee situations. This conference will be looking at intensifying the search for durable solutions, as well as initiatives and conditions necessary for achieving sustainable solutions. The solutions strategy that we are discussing here today and tomorrow is very timely and will be presented at the OIC conference as a way forward.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude my remarks by thanking the international community, the international assistance agencies, and the NGOs for their generous support - support that I and my country hope will continue - support that is enabling my Government to help refugees and returnees rebuild their lives.

Our partnership with you is strong and enduring, and we are confident it will continue.

On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I thank you.

**Speech by H.E Mr. Seyed Mohammad Reza Sajjadi,  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,  
Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran.**

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the esteemed High commissioner H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, and all his colleagues, especially the representative of UNHCR in the Islamic Republic of Iran and his team for their efforts to hold the international conference to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries with the aim of resolving the problem of afghan refugees. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Switzerland for hosting this very important conference.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

As you are well aware, outbreak of numerous conflicts in neighboring countries of Islamic Republic of Iran over the past decades has resulted in mass influx of millions of afghan and Iraqi refugees and displaced persons towards my country in search of a secure and safe environment, free from violence.



H.E Mr. Seyed Mohammad Reza Sajjadi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran.  
UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the biggest host countries of refugees in the world and still continues to host refugees and displaced persons after more than 3 decades. The long-standing presence of millions of refugees and displaced persons in Iran has imposed numerous socioeconomic pressures on the capacities of the country in different sectors such as security, employment, education, health, and treatment.

The government has conducted the 7th round of AMAYESH or Refugee and Displaced Persons Census and has updated refugee population data and issued the smart residing cards for about one million persons.

Along with the census, the government has formulated two plans for identification of vulnerable people and the implementation of Health Insurance Plan by the contribution of the HCR in Iran. The Implementation of the said plan is clear evidence to the high quality of the services provided by I.R. of Iran for masses of refugees and displaced persons.

Hospitality and generosity of the Islamic Republic of Iran has always gone beyond international standards. There are heavy costs of 283,000 Afghan students attending schools, 7000 students in universities, and medical costs of around 3000 persons affected by special diseases. Occupation of about 300,000 job's opportunity by refugees I flow of remittances of employed refugees to their country, costs and expenditures of different sectors such as jobs, health, treatment, training, public transportation and security annually impose billions of dollars to my country.

It is quite apparent that this amount cannot be compared with the amount of the international response to the UNHCR Annual Appeal which in the best situation has reached to 39 million dollars recently.

While we express our thanks for the increase of assistance in the last 3 years, I am afraid to mention that the UNHCR allocated budget doesn't even meet the need of one single day of a million refugees.

On the other hand due to exercise of purposive subsidies law and actualizing prices, which increase in prices of basic commodities, the necessity for increasing international assistance towards refugees in my country is strongly felt.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

As you know ultimate goal of this conference is to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

I would like to inform you that after the fundamental changes and the establishment of legal governments in Afghanistan, a large number of the Afghan refugee and displaced population has repatriated to their own country. In the framework of a tripartite agreement and program of voluntary repatriation, between the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and the UNHCR from 2001, we have witnessed the return of about 887,000 refugees to Afghanistan.

Concerning the return of refugees, While the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the voluntary return as a the most preferred durable solution, we believe that the international community should take seriously its responsibility in providing ways and conditions of reintegration in country of origin and all needed services to return Afghan refugees to their country.

The Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the main countries affected by the problem. of protracted refugee situation believes that the voluntary repatriation meets in the best way the demands and interests of all relevant sides among other solutions.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

According to the surveys, the fact that why voluntarily return of Afghan refugees and displaced persons have sharply been reduced, goes back to the problems like housing, job and lower welfare standards that they are faced in returning to their own country. This in turn reduces their motivation to return.

In the previous relevant meetings, it has been concluded that the domestic problems of Afghanistan specially the shortage of housing, job opportunities, training, sanitary equipment and also the gradual trend of reconstruction have led to the slow trend of return and also the improvement and promotion of this trend require cooperation and partnership of all members of international community in sharing the burden of costs and responsibilities. Paltry cash and in-kind assistance offer no inducement for voluntary repatriation and in case of voluntary repatriation; reintegration will not be permanent for returnees.

Therefore Policies and approaches toward voluntary repatriation need to be enhanced. In this regard, the continued international assistance for strengthening the livelihood and meeting the needs of the returnee's refugees is required to be reformulated. In fact, assistance can be guided and channeled through the government. This approach will decrease the possibility of waste of resources and provide suitable condition for permanent residence throughout Afghanistan.

As ever, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that, sufficient budget could be spent on settlement arrangements in the returnee's main destinations and enough attention be paid to the settlement of returnees in their desired regions such as big cities or the reintegration costs to be paid in cash to them under certain circumstances.



The international community should play more active role in post-repatriation era and should contribute to the process of voluntary repatriation until the refugees could be re-integrated in their homeland. The enhancement of conditions of returnees in Afghanistan realizes a voluntary, secure and honorable return of refugees. We need to remain mindful of the fact that provision of assistance and motivation for the voluntary return of Afghan professionals to their homeland helps and expedites the reconstruction of their country.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

Concerning the resettlement, while considering resettlement as one of the durable solutions to the plight of refugees and the best way to sharing burden and responsibility by third countries, the number of resettled refugees from my country, is less than 1 % of HCR resettlement cases per year.

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly demands UNHCR and specially developed countries to set quota for resettlement proportionate to the huge number of vulnerable and needy refugees residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this respect I should draw your attention to the low number of resettlement states and highlight the possible role of the developed countries in fulfilling their international responsibility.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

As you are well aware, after 10 year of stabilization of legal Government in Afghanistan which provides fundamental change in that country, and opportunity for the international community to meet the rational needs of the refugee returned in Afghanistan and increase the needed funds in the construction fields specially establishing and equipping educational spaces and health centers for them. At the same time expedite their endeavors aimed at setting the proper economic infrastructures in Afghanistan to encourage the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and displaced persons for return and re-integration in their country.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

A recent survey has shown that a large number of afghan returnees faced with difficulties to restart and rebuilding their lives. Therefore it is incumbent upon international community to redouble its efforts for providing assistance for reintegration of afghan returnees in their country. In this regard, international community and UNHCR should perform tangible deeds and support the efforts to ensure the repatriation and sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees in Afghanistan.

In Conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I do hope that this conference with the lofty intention of international community to support the voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration of afghan refugees and assistance to host countries could effectively fill the existing gap between voluntary repatriation and reintegration and achieve the ultimate goal of resolving the prolonged problem of afghan refugees.

I thank you.

**Speech by Engineer Shaukat Ullah, Minister for SAFRON, Pakistan**

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to first express our gratitude to the representatives of Governments, international agencies and the civil society for their participation in this important conference.

Their participation is a manifestation of their interest in supporting voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

I would like to thank the High Commissioner for his leadership and tireless efforts that have culminated in this Conference. I also thank the Swiss Government for hosting this Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghan refugees left their homeland over three decades ago. They constitute the largest protracted refugee situation in the world. This is one of the most pressing issues in our region. Although there is international interest in this region, the situation of refugees is yet to receive the attention that it deserves.



Engineer Shaukat Ullah, Minister for SAFRON, Pakistan.  
UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

Over the years we have seen foreign assistance diminish and international attention diverted from the plight of these refugees. With decreased international attention and limited foreign assistance, the burden on the host countries has increased tremendously.

In the spirit of our traditional hospitality, Pakistan has hosted Afghan refugees for decades. It is still host to about 1.7 million refugees. In terms of population growth, nearly 83,000 are added to the Afghan refugees population each year. As a result the increase in Afghan refugee population is higher than the number of individuals repatriated.

The lengthy stay of refugees and anemic repatriation efforts have given rise to political, security, socio-economic, financial and environmental challenges. This has placed a heavy burden on the society and contributed to a change in local perception of Afghan refugees and their continued stay in Pakistan.

The Government of Pakistan has set its vision for Afghan refugees in its Management and Repatriation Strategy 2010-2012. Voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees by December 2012 is at the heart of this strategy. It does not allow us to agree to any proposal which grants Afghan refugees the status of economic migrants or any other status except for temporary management as per government approved Strategy.

We believe, therefore, the foremost priority of the international community should be to reenergize the repatriation process. Our preference is that refugee repatriation is voluntary, orderly and swift.

We understand that this would require a concerted effort to create conducive conditions inside Afghanistan. Pakistan is, therefore, keen to work with the international community, especially our Afghan brethren to create pull factors inside Afghanistan for an early return and sustainable reintegration of the refugees. To that end, we will have to create robust partnerships to focus on investment in high return areas inside Afghanistan,

Pakistan is convinced that the way forward lies in international cooperation and burden sharing. The Solutions Strategy would have three pillars: first, robust support for repatriation and resettlement programs; second, working with the Afghan Government to foster conditions inside Afghanistan for sustainable reintegration; and third, support for host countries to offset the burden they have been carrying for decades.

As we prepare for their return, it is critically important to strengthen synergies between the refugees and the host communities for instance by reinforcing the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA).

To be successful, we should ensure that the host countries and Afghanistan have full ownership of the strategies devised for refugees. The partnership between donors, the UNHCR and the three countries should take place within the framework devised by the individual countries. Enhancing the capacity of local institutions should be a critical objective.

The host countries need a clear demonstration that international donor community understands the challenges they face and that it is ready to share the burden they have been carrying for over three decades. UNHCR should also now focus on facilitating early and safe return of refugees to Afghanistan.

As the international community winds down its engagement in Afghanistan, return of refugees should be accorded high priority. In our view the return of Afghan refugees has to be an integral element of final settlement in Afghanistan.

I am confident if we work together we would be successful in ensuring the successful return to their homeland of the 3 million Afghan refugees still living in Pakistan and Iran.

I hope this conference and its communiqué will be known as a landmark event when the international community came together to express support for the voluntary return of Afghan refugees, their sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.

## Working Group 1: Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration 2 May 2012

Co-Chairs: Afghanistan & USA, Rapporteur: UNHCR

### **Voluntary Repatriation**

#### *Comments:*

- Most desired durable solution: joint responsibility / commitment of international community to make VolRep sustainable
- Governments need to promote and facilitate VolRep
- Caution against forced repatriation (whether to place of origin or elsewhere).

#### *Suggestions:*

- Communication strategy needed for Afghan refugees to make informed decision on VolRep
- Improve information sharing and coordination between hosting countries and Afghanistan about situation of Afghan refugees still in exile
- Re-evaluate (many dimensional) root causes behind refugee movement
- Promote resettlement to third countries

### **Job Creation / Opportunities:**

#### *Comments:*

- Return will increase job scarcity in short term
- How to make temporary jobs sustainable in long term?
- Returning refugees with good skills may / may not be the most vulnerable?

#### *Suggestions:*

- Analyse labour market, map future investments; identify skill trainings required; maximising local procurement possibilities; these require strong coordination and support
- Develop indigenous private sector and increase mobility to search for jobs
- Review lessons learned in Somalia, Iraq and Sri Lanka, e.g LADP



Co-Chair of the Working Group 1, USA, during the report back. UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

### **Capacity building of government institutions / civil society**

#### *Comments:*

- Ability of government to handle the challenge in the future (less funds / human resources handling other issues, e.g. national security transfer)

#### *Suggestions:*

- Involve civil society in discussions
- Decentralise capacity building into provinces, not just at Kabul level

### **Humanitarian access**

#### *Comments:*

- Growing concern about the deteriorating environment

#### *Suggestions:*

- Need for reality check – interventions cannot be undertaken in many parts of Afghanistan due to lack of access

### **Access to basic services and natural resources**

#### *Comments:*

- Being tackled at urban / provincial levels, but rural areas still have limited access.

#### *Suggestions:*

- Supporting peaceful co-existence by upgrading basic services in areas of high return

### **Alignment with NPPs**

#### *Comments:*

- Sustainable reintegration depends on sustainable development (on budget, Afghan-led)
- Strategy's operational budget needs to be on-budget; thereby enabling donors to support through NPPs.
- Challenge: make sure returnees and IDPs are covered by sustainable development (i.e. in NPPs)

#### *Suggestions:*

- Need to ensure NPPs cover returnees and IDPs, especially in lead up to Tokyo
- Need to ensure NPPs are not just at provincial level, but to take them down to the district level (governance and capacity dimensions)

### **Link with Other Processes**

#### *Comments:*

- What is the state of thinking of quadripartite group to integrate their initiative into the wider discussions in Tokyo?

#### *Suggestions:*

- Important to develop linkage with these other processes, e.g. Istanbul and Kabul processes

### **Monitoring / Evaluation**

#### *Comments:*

- Remote control due to access limitations can hinder effective monitoring which may lead to poor programmes

#### *Suggestions:*

- Need to improve this oversight mechanism

### **Successful reintegration**

#### *Comments:*

- Best sustainability of return is if refugees return to their communities of origin.
- Involvement of community authorities / elders

#### *Suggestions:*

- Need to concentrate on those high return areas which have most chance of success, and limit interventions to those that are realistic
- Implement a structured policy-driven (on-budget) approach which is community based
- Hosting countries to give Afghanistan time to develop capacity / coping mechanisms for returned and returning Afghan refugees

## Working Group 2 Capacity Building: Skills, Education and Vocational Training

Capacity building, skills development, education and vocational training promote the way to voluntary repatriation and sustain reintegration. All the participants acknowledged the political and financial effort of the host countries in this area and praised the Government of Afghanistan for putting the refugee issues in the core of the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). There is a need for support from the international community as the host countries are facing financial pressure. The level of qualification will play have a strong influence on the decision to return or not. Participants all agreed on the fact that the higher the skill level of returnees is, the less reversible their decision to stay in the country is. To that was added the general consensus that there is a high demand for skilled labor in Afghanistan, which is paving the way for voluntary repatriation. Based on the discussions, those recommendations have been formulated:



Co-Chair of the Working Group 2, Germany. During the report back. UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

1. Capacity building, skills education and vocational training have to be in line with the ANDS and the National Priority Program (NPP).
2. During the group discussions, participants agreed that sustainable returns would largely be affected on a more general success linked to improvements in the security, governance and development sectors. Education and vocational training need to be an integrated part of a returnee package, which would emphasize on shelter, livelihood and access to basic services.
3. Different educational systems are being applied for refugees. Iran has an integrated approach where cost of education for refugees is subsidize. Support to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is needed to create specific vocational training centers to Afghan refugees in urban settings and to lower the entrance fees for Afghan refugees to access the regular Iranian education system. Pakistan refugees enjoy a parallel education system designed to support the reintegration of the refugees upon return. UNHCR has to be supported in the education effort conducted in the region with high concentration of refugees, particularly in vocational training. Vocational training centers create in KPK are a good example as they profit equally the local population as well as the refugees.
4. Vocational training and skills development have to take into consideration the needs in Afghanistan and be supported by sustainable

packages, livelihood and shelter. It must be offered in all three countries at the same time, with a focus on training for returnees in Afghanistan, engaging with them on a long term, from training to employment.

5. Vocational training is provided to refugees outside and inside Afghanistan. Participants to the discussions agreed that curricula of vocational trainings provided in and outside Afghanistan would guarantee minimum training standards and an integrated approach to vocational training.
6. Vocational training for refugees should be extended to local residents on a 50% basis.
7. Analysis of the job market in Afghanistan will provide crucial information to determine the skills required and the Vocational training courses to be followed for a successful reintegration in to the job market. The Afghan Ministry of Labor should be strengthened to improve the understanding of labor market dynamics.
8. The use of existing information gathering and management tools as well as timely exchange of information facilitates the sharing best practices, amongst the three governments involved. Discussion on education issues should also include education specialists from the civil society.
9. Coordination between the 3 governments on how to expedite the return of Afghan and how conditions in Afghanistan can be enhanced through the tripartite commission at different levels of participation.

### Report of Working Group 3.

Working Group 3 dealt with issue of partnerships with development actors and community based approaches as part of the “Solutions Strategy to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries”.

It was recognized that there were three related objectives in the strategy for which these issues are relevant:

1. For returned refugees to stay in Afghanistan, rather than to return to the country that hosted them as refugees.
2. Creating conditions where refugees now in Pakistan and or Iran, feel conditions in Afghanistan provide enough future opportunities to “pull” them as voluntary returnees back to Afghanistan.
3. To assist residual refugees and the host communities/host countries to maintain services to the entire community, including assisting the host community in dealing with the extra costs to them associated with hosting a refugee population for over thirty years.



Co-Chair of Working Group 3, Japan, during the report back. UNHCR Photo / Jean-Marc Ferré

From the discussion it was apparent that for these objectives to be met there were a number of challenges to overcome. Among these were:

- The strength of community ties was in many cases had become weaker as communities were split or weakened by many years of displacement and the circumstances that led to that displacement. Furthermore continuing urbanization, issues of land title, and more frequent movement make community building more difficult.
- The economic environment in Afghanistan, currently limits economic opportunities for returning refugees, and when combined with uncertainties in some areas about security, makes refugees more hesitant to return.
- There is a legacy of parallel structures set up in Afghanistan which hamper community based approaches and building the capacity of local government structures.
- The limited amount of funds available to date for community based re-integration initiatives.
- In Pakistan in a number of areas, tensions among Afghan refugees and the host communities have grown, potentially harming the prospects for both the host communities and for those refugees hosted by those communities.

To meet these challenges the working group recommended the solutions strategy be implemented through a range of measures. Among these were:

- In Afghanistan the solutions strategy should be implemented through government leadership and be integrated with existing government programmes, including the NPPs. However to ensure that the results from work under the solutions strategy can be tracked, there should be monitoring that can determine the level of progress consistent with the



strategy's objectives, and permit adjustments to implementation based on experience.

- In Afghanistan there should be more emphasis on skills development and on applying the principles of decent work, while at the same time providing more opportunities to unleash and support the tremendous entrepreneurial energy Afghans have demonstrated they possess and they can apply - in even very poor environments. Linked to this could be the development of more private–public partnerships.
- A good model of support of returnees in Afghanistan is provided by the “Community Development Project for Returnees and Receiving Communities in Nangarhar Province”, which aims at raising living standards of returnees as well as other members of the village through improvements to village infrastructure, benefiting 170,000 people. This is supported by JICA with UNHCR helping to fine-tune the plans and identify areas of work. There are also good examples from other work supported by the UN country team, notably longstanding UNDP support on community development. The need is to scale this work up under Afghan government leadership with strong involvement of local authorities and community leaders.
- Programmes of assistance to Afghan refugees in Pakistan should continue but they should include a stronger role of Government in the management and leadership of the programmes and more emphasis on capacities and sustainability.
- In Pakistan the ongoing Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) programme uses a proven approach to meet the needs of both refugees in need of assistance and of host communities. Future programmes should use a similar approach, including being led by the Government. However unlike in Afghanistan where solutions strategy activities should to the maximum extent possible be integrated into existing government programmes to support community development, in Pakistan the programmes should have a separate identity, so that host communities recognize these are special programmes to help them cope with the exceptional circumstances of hosting Afghan refugees for more than 30 years.
- For all the above, the lead refugee agency in the concerned government should be an important interlocutor, but not the central one, as the needs to be dealt with go beyond their capacity and there should be work with the central “development” ministry and respective line ministries.
- All programmes done in partnership with government need to make special provisions for people with special needs, including older people, young people, HIV positive people, and those affected by drug use.
- The Working Group noted the high level of services provided by the Government of Iran to Afghan refugees within existing government programmes, including the largest part of the funding.

In conclusion, Working Group 3 endorsed the approach called for in the Solutions Strategy, though with more emphasis on community building, complementarity with existing national plans, and work with government partners at the local, provincial and national levels; and in Pakistan an expansion of the approach used in the RAHA programme. For these new and/or expanded programmes to work, there needs to be a renewed commitment to partnership by all parties.

**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees,  
To Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
And Assistance to Host Countries  
WEDNESDAY 2 MAY 2012 (Morning session)**

**LIST OF SPEAKERS**

	Delegation	Name	Title
1.	DENMARK	H.E. Mr. Steffen Smidt	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
2.	JAPAN	H.E. Mr. Kenichi Suganuma	Ambassador Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
3.	USA	Ms. Anne Richard	Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
4.	TURKEY	H.E. Mr. Oguz Demiralp	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
5.	GERMANY	H.E. Mr. Hanns Schumacher	Ambassador Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
6.	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	H.E. Mr. Obaid Salem Saeed Al Zaabi	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
7.	EUROPEAN UNION	H.E. Ms. Mariangela Zappia	Ambassador Permanent Observer and Chief of the Permanent Delegation to the United Nations Office at Geneva
8.	NORWAY	H.E. Mr. Steffen Kongstad	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
9.	CHINA	Mr. YU Shukun	Minister Counsellor Permanent Mission to the United Nations at Geneva
10.	CANADA	Mr. Pascal Desbiens	Counsellor (Humanitarian Affairs Section) Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva

	Delegation	Name	Title
11.	NETHERLANDS	Ms. Carola Baller	First Secretary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva
12.	KENYA	Ms. Anne Keah	Third Secretary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva

**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees,  
To Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
And Assistance to Host Countries  
(Afternoon session)**

**LIST OF SPEAKERS**

	Delegation	Name	Title
13.	SWEDEN	H.E. Mr. Jan Knutsson	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
14.	AUSTRALIA	Mr. Simon Schiwy	Assistant Secretary International Cooperation Branch Department of Immigration and Citizenship
15.	ITALY	H.E. Ms. Laura Mirachian	Ambassador Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
16.	BRAZIL	Mr. Joao Genesisio de Almeida Filho	Minister Counsellor Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva
17.	SAUDI ARABIA	Prince Jalawi Turki Fahad Jalawi Al Saud	Attache Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva
18.	INDIA	Ms. Kheya Bhattacharya	Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva
19.	BANGLADESH	Ms. Preeti Rahman	First Secretary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva
20.	REPUBLIC OF KOREA	Mr. Young-kyu Park	Counsellor Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva
21.	Economic Cooperation Organisation	Mr. Mohammad Yahya Maroofi	Secretary-General
22.	WFP	Mr. Brian Lander	Senior Programme Adviser
23.	ILO	Mr. Alfredo Lazarte Hoyle	Director Crisis Response and Reconstruction Department
24.	UNODC	Ms. Soltani Fariba	Expert Drug Prevention and Health Branch
25.	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) On behalf of NGOs	Mr. Wael Haj Ibrahim	Director

International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries,

Geneva, 02 May 2012

Ministers, Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

Denmark welcomes this opportunity to discuss the refugee situation in Afghanistan and would like to thank the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and the UNHCR for engaging the work on the solution strategy for Afghan Refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries.

We share the concerns on the Afghan refugee situation, that lasted more than three decades and constitutes one of the largest and longest standing refugee situations in the world.

Denmark has, in recognition of the regional dimension, since 2005 supported the reintegration of refugees, returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan through the Region of Origins Initiative. The overall objective of this initiative is to help secure access to protection and sustainable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons as close to their home as possible.

The region of Origins Initiative accounts for about 20% of the Danish assistance to Afghanistan each year, which totals approximately 100 mio.USD this year. The programme operates through four implementing partners, including UNHCR, and supports the local communities by providing shelters, access to basic services, water and sanitation and legal advice.

The aim is to bring back human capital to Afghanistan by strengthening the resources of the returning Afghan refugees in order to enable them to contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan after many decades of war.

Afghanistan is in a transition process and there is a risk that the flow of resources for humanitarian and development interventions will decline after the withdrawal of the international troops by the end of 2014.

Reintegrating large numbers of refugees can become a major economic and social opportunity for Afghanistan. Developing income - generating initiatives and increasing employment opportunities are therefore key elements in order to reach sustainable solutions for the returnees.

It is imperative that the implementation of the Solution Strategy for Afghan refugees is complemented by strong development policies focused on economic growth and job creation.

Securing land rights, upholding rule of law and access to justice are also important prerequisites for ensuring sustainable repatriation of refugees. The Afghan Authorities must therefore ensure that a sufficient legal framework is in place for the returning population in order to enable economic activities and prevent conflicts in the local communities.

The overwhelming reintegration trend to date has been secondary displacement. A population which has been uprooted do not always intend to return to their villages of origin. Often there is a move towards urban areas, where livelihood conditions are perceived as being better than in the rural areas. This urbanization trend should be captured in the strategy in order to target the returnees successfully.

Also Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are a growing concern in Afghanistan. A recent trend shows an increasing number of conflict-induced IDPs and it is equally important to ensure that their needs are addressed by the Afghan government and the international community a long side the support for the refugees.

Denmark also wants to commend the neighbouring countries hosting the Afghan refugees for their hospitality and willingness to support and for providing access to basic health care, education and employment opportunities. However challenges persist and international cooperation as well as a comprehensive, integrated approach is needed for a long term solution.

With the remaining 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran having stayed for several decades, there appears to be a need for a broader approach to finding a long-term solution to the refugee. The host countries should therefore develop an explicit two-pronged approach in dealing with the remaining refugee population.

Finally, a successful implementation of the solution strategy will depend on its alignment with national priorities in the respective countries as well as the “buy-in” and coordination amongst national governments. Denmark encourages all the stakeholders to contribute to this process in order to ensure sustainable solutions for the Afghan refugees.

Thank you.

**Statement of Japan for International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for  
Afghan Refugees**

**Geneva, 2 May 2012**

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

At the outset, Japan pays tribute to the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan along with UNHCR for preparing a solutions strategy for Afghan refugees. Japan also appreciates Switzerland's joint hosting of this conference.

The plight of Afghan refugees represents the world's largest protracted refugee situation. It has continued for more than 30 years, and 1 million refugees currently remain in Iran and 1.7 million in Pakistan. I would like to thank Iran and Pakistan for the generous contribution that they have been making as refugee-host countries. Japan greatly appreciates the quadripartite cooperation shown by Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and UNHCR in formulating this new regional strategy to shed further light and to encourage further progress on this issue. Japan is hopeful that the strategy can be successfully realized based on the continued cooperation of the four parties.

Over the past ten years, some 5.7 million Afghans have returned home. However, as many returnees experience difficulties in rebuilding their lives upon

return, the pace of voluntary repatriation has slowed. In order to improve the refugee situation, it is vital that conditions in Afghanistan be made more conducive to the return of refugees including ensuring greater security. It is also essential that the refugee issue be considered within the overall context of the development of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has entered a new phase in its nation-building process toward complete self-reliance. Looking ahead to the completion of the security transition to Afghan national institutions by the end of 2014 and the ten years of reform to follow, it is trying to plot a course toward mid-to-long-term stability. To help facilitate this process, Japan is now preparing to host a ministerial conference on Afghanistan in July in Tokyo on the main theme of development strategy for the sustainable growth of Afghanistan. At the same time, leading up to this meeting, the Afghan government is working to identify priority areas in which it seeks to foster sustainable growth and development. Japan hopes that the outcome of this conference will be meaningful for assisting Afghanistan in identifying such priorities.

Although it is necessary to examine the situation of Afghanistan at a macro level, it is crucial to also consider it at a micro level, that is, the specific needs of each individual and refugee-hosting community. Community development and capacity building for economic and social self-reliance with a focus on the individual situation of each refugee, returnee, and host-community resident serves a visible, realistic step to improving the situation of Afghan refugees.



With this in mind, Japan is cooperating with UNHCR and UNDP as well as participating in the RAHA (Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas) Initiative in Pakistan and offering returnee assistance in Afghanistan. Japan aims to facilitate development at the community level benefitting both refugees/returnees and local residents. In order to advance such efforts, I look forward to a beneficial exchange of opinions in this afternoon's working group on Partnership with development and humanitarian actors and community-based approaches.

Finally, the situation of Afghan refugees can only be improved through a strong partnership between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan as well as with the international community. On that note, allow me to close my remarks by reaffirming Japan's commitment to making the utmost effort to work with the other stakeholders gathered here today to address this issue.

I thank you.

**USA Remarks at the Afghanistan Refugee Conference  
Geneva, May 2, 2012**

**Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugee and Migration  
Anne C. Richard**

On behalf of the United States, it is a pleasure to participate in this important conference. Our gathering here in Geneva endorses a regional, multi-year strategy consistent with our combined efforts in Afghanistan. The return of nearly six million refugees to Afghanistan symbolizes hope in the country's future, but we must all work together to ensure their lasting reintegration. UNHCR, the Government of Afghanistan, and the international community have been working hard to make Afghanistan a home where returning refugees can successfully re-start and re-build after years of having their lives disrupted by conflict. We pledge our continued support to this large scale project. Our continued collaboration with the Afghan Government, in support of returning refugees, is just one piece of the United States' enduring partnership with Afghanistan. Just last week, I signed an agreement with Minister Suraya Dalil of the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, so that by July 31, 2013, twenty-six clinics in the three provinces – and the essential services they provide – will be fully turned over to the Ministry of Public Health. And we'll work together to make sure that transition to the Ministry's management is both responsible and smooth. The progress that Afghanistan has achieved, in partnership with the international community, including in health, and in the education of Afghan boys and girls, will contribute to the sustainable reintegration of returned refugees. We must also continue to protect those who cannot yet return to Afghanistan, even as we remain committed to continuing our support to efforts to reintegrate refugees within Afghanistan. This strategy is consistent with the Kabul process in that it strengthens the long term commitment of the international community; it is also in line with the Istanbul Process in that it encourages regional solutions for Afghanistan's problems. This strategy recognizes the need for Afghanistan's neighbors to be involved, just as they have been while generously hosting millions of Afghan refugees for more than 30 years. The strategy also recognizes the need to maintain "asylum space" and protection for Afghan who cannot return to Afghanistan. We urge the renewal of proof of registration cards for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Set to expire in December of this year, these cards offer legal protection to refugee not yet ready or able to return to Afghanistan. We commend Pakistan's Cabinet-approved Afghan Management and Repatriation Strategy and we urge its implementation at the soonest opportunity. We commend progress made in the region to document migrants who have sought jobs, health care, and education opportunities across international borders. Regularizing the movements of both documented refugees and those who have traveled without passports and visas is an important step in border management. When Afghans fled conflict, their first and most immediate needs were basics: food, shelter and protection. As they have returned to their homes and their lives, success will depend on access to education and jobs. All share a desire to see this succeed whether we are aid workers, hosts, or refugees. The link between relief and development is especially important in achieving dignity and self-reliance. We remain committed to assisting refugees, refugee returnees, and contributing to Afghanistan's inclusive national development plan. President Obama's visit to Kabul yesterday underscored our continued support for strong institutions and economic development in Afghanistan. Our contributions support the ultimate aim of strengthening Afghan sovereignty, ensuring stability and building prosperity to the benefit of all Afghans and the countries of the region.

## German Statement at the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Geneva, 2/3 May 2012

Thank you, Mr/Ms Chair.

The Afghan refugee community is the largest in the world, has been hosted in the Islamic Republic Of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for partly more than 30 years and remains concentrated mainly in these two countries. I am pointing this out in order to emphasise the magnitude of the engagement and commitment displayed by the governments and the peoples of Iran and Pakistan. These two countries have readily shouldered an immense burden, which deserves the fullest appreciation and the deepest gratitude not only of the Afghan people, but the world at large. In face of the enormous number of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, it merits special mentioning that these hosting countries have shown a very high degree of patience, and I would like to encourage them both to continue to adhere to the principle of voluntary return.

The Government of Germany welcomes the joint approach taken by the three governments and the UNHCR, which led to the development of this multi-year regional „Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees“. The acknowledgement that this cross-border situation can only be dealt with and solved collaboratively marked a turning point. The German Government is confident that the joint strategy can make a significant contribution to a sustainable resolution of the Afghan refugee situation. It is, however, necessary to continue this close and trustful cooperation in order to reach the goals of the strategy.

In addition to that, tangible progress in the stabilisation and economic development of Afghanistan is crucial. The Afghan refugee situation can only be resolved if sufficient pull-factors for potential returnees are created. Temporary reintegration support does not suffice. Neither do isolated efforts that remain disconnected from other channels of structured development. It is vital that the Solutions Strategy is firmly interwoven with national development strategies and national priority programmes and correlates to regional initiatives, such as the Istanbul Process, which aims to foster regional cooperation in support for the longterm stability of AFG and the region. The Istanbul Process document identified a range of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) including economic cooperation. We are looking forward to the Ministerial Conference, convened on 14 June 2012 in Kabul, as the first follow up ministerial meeting of the Istanbul Process.

Linking humanitarian aid and development aid efficiently constitutes another challenge. This protracted refugee situation is a model case for the necessity to thoroughly coordinate the engagements of humanitarian and development actors. The Solutions Strategy addresses this issue. Now, the time has come to more effectively put this commitment into action.

The international community is well aware of the suffering of millions of Afghans that lost their homes and have been waiting for the right time to return. It is our strong commitment to and our sympathy for the people in need and the two hosting countries who bear a large share of the burden that brought us together today. By supporting the Solutions Strategy, we reconfirm our readiness to share this burden.

The German Government has proven its strong commitment to support the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran as well as to play a central role in the international development cooperation with the Afghan Government. Last December, at the UNHCR Ministerial Conference,

Germany pledged an even more extended and substantial contribution to the resolution of the Afghan refugee and IDP situation in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan itself. Today, I would like to point out that Germany has already delivered on its promise and will continue to be a sincere and committed partner.

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Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the UN Refugee Agency and Switzerland for co-hosting The "International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries" in Geneva and we are honored to participate at this important event.

I take this opportunity to highlight the commitment of The United Arab Emirates to support the efforts of the international community to help Afghanistan and particularly the Afghan refugees to improve their reintegration in their country. In this context, the UAE has hosted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2012 the International Contact Group on Afghanistan with the participation of 60 countries and a number of regional and international organizations.



The UAE is a very active partner in Afghanistan either bilaterally or multilaterally. Our cooperation with Afghanistan represents 14 percent of our total foreign aid. Considerable parts of the donations have been allocated to infrastructure, services and construction.

The UAE believes that the peace-building is a long-term and demanding process which requires consistency and commitment. Therefore, we strongly support the strategies and programs aimed at providing sustainable relief for Millions of Afghan refugees. In this regard, it is worth noting that more than 5.7 million Afghans have returned home since 2001.

We appreciate the cooperation between the UN agencies and other partners which are working in the field, and look forward to a further coordination in their plans of action to identify the needs of the population. We are aware that it is very difficult to work in a conflict zone, but we can work together to respond to the humanitarian aid and protection needs arising from armed conflicts, particularly displaced persons.



Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UAE will continue, as it has done before, its support for the implementation of infrastructure and other vital development projects in Afghanistan, including the reconstruction and rehabilitation of its institutional, health, agricultural, social and security sectors as well as its national economy, in order to restore security and stability in all parts of the country and reduce the suffering of its people.

Finally, we call for a strengthened role of the United Nations, the other International Organizations and their partners in Afghanistan to continue their efforts to consolidate peace, development and stability in this country.

I thank you.



Ministers, High Commissioner,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues

I would like to convey to you the gratitude of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Lady Catherine Ashton, for inviting her to this event. She could not be present in Geneva today, but she has asked me to represent her and to pass on to you her wishes of success with this important Conference.

Thank you also for the invitations conveyed to European Commissioners Piebalgs and Georgieva who will be represented today and tomorrow by an important delegation coming from Brussels and Kabul.

I would like to welcome and support the initiative taken by the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan with the UNHCR to develop a multi-annual "Solutions Strategy" with the aim to work towards comprehensive solutions for Afghan refugees.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the generosity of the people of Pakistan and Iran and the solidarity they have shown towards the huge numbers of Afghan refugees they have been accommodating for what is now a period exceeding 30 years. We applaud this spirit of hospitality. I also commend our partners in UNHCR for their long-term engagement with displaced Afghans.

While we understand the burden that the refugees have placed on the two hosting countries, we also need to consider the current situation in Afghanistan. In the present circumstances challenges to reintegrate returning refugees on a sustainable basis remain formidable. The scale and complexity of the issue requires long-term engagement. There are no quick solutions. I can assure you that the European Union is strongly committed to maintaining close co-operation with UNHCR and the three countries concerned on this important question.

We look forward to the discussions during this conference which should help to guide the future elaboration of the implementation, coordination and monitoring mechanisms of the strategy. With respect to Afghan returnees, we would like to reiterate the importance of aligning the Solutions Strategy to the National Priority Programmes which will be presented in Tokyo in July 2012. UNHCR should play a proactive role in promoting this.



We expect the Tokyo Conference to be an important benchmark of the Kabul Process.

Over the last couple of years we have together looked into ways to address the question of Afghan displacement and migration. Making the transition from humanitarian relief to rehabilitation and development, and supporting refugee returns and making them sustainable, represent crucial parts of this process.

Beyond that, the European Union actively contributes, on a regional basis, to possible medium- to long-term strategies for refugees and economic migrants in the region. For instance, the EU supports to Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas through development programmes that benefit both Pakistanis and Afghans in selected rural areas. Through UNHCR, the EU has also supported registration of Afghans in Pakistan and we recognise and welcome the Government of Pakistan's flexible and generous approach in extending proof of registration cards beyond their original expiry dates. We would appreciate if this could continue to be handled in a sensitive and flexible manner also in future.

Any durable solution needs to continue to be based firmly on the principle of voluntary returns.

We therefore need to continue pursuing a twin-track approach. It is fundamental to continue to address legitimate protection-related concerns of refugees inside and outside Afghanistan, including preserving asylum space. At the same time, it is important to continue to work together to create the conditions that will induce refugee populations to return of their own accord.

Currently, within Afghanistan, there are nearly half a million of Internally Displaced Persons, including those affected by natural disasters. This is extremely worrying. Through our humanitarian funding we help to address the immediate humanitarian needs of these populations. We need to ensure that this equally vulnerable target population is taken into account within the perspective of socio-economic development and included in the further elaboration of the Solutions Strategy.

It is clear that the broader challenge of refugees, displaced people and population movements has to be managed at a regional level between the countries in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, and not purely as an issue of displaced populations. The "Istanbul Process" has opened new possibilities for Afghanistan and its neighbours to address the wider questions, so helping to achieve a peaceful end to the conflicts which caused the outflow of refugees in the first place. We hope further progress can be registered at the Kabul Conference in June. Indeed, responsibility for managing these challenges

lies primarily with the governments concerned. Our role can only be to provide support. I would therefore like to express, again, our appreciation for the initiative to set up a quadripartite consultative process involving the three countries concerned and the UNHCR.

In today's interconnected world, population mobility is a challenge for all states. The EU is no exception here. We need to tackle these issues with all the instruments at our disposal - political, diplomatic, economic, humanitarian and developmental - and in a more integrated fashion to help contribute to regional stability. Today's discussions are intended to make progress in designing such a comprehensive framework. I believe that by continuing these discussions in a spirit of partnership and openness, we can work towards an integrated solution which will serve the interests of Afghanistan and its neighbours.



***International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries***

***Geneva May 2 – 3, 2012***

***Statement by Mr Steffen Kongstad, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway***

***Check against delivery***

The situation for Afghan refugees represents the most challenging protracted refugee situation worldwide. For decades approximately three million registered refugees and maybe just as many non-registered Afghan citizens have resided in Iran and Pakistan. The numbers are daunting and the quest for durable solutions is long overdue.

Norway commends the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran for the agreement on the way forward in protecting and supporting Afghan refugees and returnees. UNHCR's facilitating role is also much appreciated. The Solutions Strategy before us is a welcome step aimed at securing broad commitment by donors and concerned governments towards durable solutions.

It is our hope that the political momentum created by this conference will lead to concrete improvements in the lives of the millions of Afghan refugees and returnees.

All governments, in a spirit of solidarity and burden sharing, should support the plight of Afghan refugees. My government provides support through UNHCR and NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council. Going forward we are committed to sustained support for the Afghan refugees.

Resettlement is another instrument of burden sharing. This option can however only benefit a minority of refugees, namely the most vulnerable. Norway is currently in the process of resettling two hundred Afghan refugees from Iran.

Successful return and reintegration are premised on a number of interrelated and complex conditions. Nevertheless, in our view there are two main factors which will determine the outcome as far as Afghan refugees are concerned and which therefore deserve our full attention;

Firstly - safety and protection of returnees. The strategy refers to growing insecurity and massive increase in internal displacement within Afghanistan. This is a disturbing trend

which merits close monitoring. Needless to say, no mass return can be launched if security is not ripe and appropriate protection for returnees cannot be provided.

Secondly – shelter, basic services and livelihood opportunities. The proposed assistance plan, by means of pilot reintegration sites in Afghanistan, has a fairly limited target. It is essential for the strategy to widen its scope based on a contextual assessment and thereby addressing the basic needs of both returnees and internally displaced.

The profile of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran needs also to be taken into account. A predominately urban population most of whom born in exile, is bound to require specific attention within any reintegration effort.

Sustainability of return is key. Experience has repeatedly demonstrated that unless conditions are right, returnees will opt for renewed flight alternatives. Secondary movements, instability and continued human suffering are the unfortunate results.

The Solutions Strategy has an inherent risk of creating parallel structures. This would neither be sustainable, nor cost-efficient. Any effort inside Afghanistan must form part of the country's larger development plan, and benefit both affected host communities and returnees.

It is also essential for the strategy to incorporate measures required by the Afghan Government to support longer-term reintegration efforts, including urban planning approaches. Shortfalls in land allocation and administration must also be addressed.

Success in this endeavour will require sustained political support by relevant government ministries at the national and sub-national level in the three countries concerned. Broad based international financial support will also be required. The latter cannot, however, substitute the need for national ownership and political will.

We trust that this conference will provide an opportunity to strengthen the analysis underpinning the Solutions Strategy, and to further detail the ways in which it relates to the needs of Afghan refugees and returnees.

The plight of the millions of Afghan men, women and children caught up in protracted displacement deserve our continued attention and commitment.

Cover 20

PROJET DE DÉCLARATION Version Podium

CONFÉRENCE INTERNATIONALE SUR UNE STRATÉGIE DE  
RECHERCHE DE SOLUTIONS DURABLES POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS  
AFGHANS – LES 2 ET 3 MAI, GENÈVE (SUISSE)

Honorables ministres, Haut-Commissaire Guterres, chers collègues,

J'aimerais, au nom du gouvernement du **Canada**, remercier le gouvernement de la Suisse et le Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés d'avoir organisé cette réunion. En effet, cette conférence offre une occasion importante d'explorer davantage comment trouver des solutions durables pour les réfugiés afghans.

Depuis 2002, des réalisations considérables ont été accomplies; plus de 5,7 millions de réfugiés afghans ont pu retourner chez eux afin de se bâtir un avenir et renouer avec leur communauté. Pendant cette période, le Canada a grandement investi afin d'améliorer la qualité de vie des réfugiés afghans, tant par la création de meilleures conditions de sécurité en Afghanistan que par l'amélioration des perspectives économiques pour leur permettre un retour durable.



**Mr. President,**

**For the years of 2011 to 2014, Canada has committed \$300 million through the Canadian International Development Agency. This includes investments in the future of Afghan children and youth through development programming in education, health, human rights and humanitarian assistance. Canada will also continue to support refugee-affected and hosting communities through development and humanitarian programming in Pakistan.**

**Nous soutenons les efforts du Haut-Commissariat visant à combler l'écart entre l'aide humanitaire et la création de conditions propices au retour durable des réfugiés dans leur pays. La coopération et la collaboration étroite entre les administrations locales et nationales ainsi que les partenaires en matière d'aide humanitaire et de développement sont essentielles. Cela sera particulièrement important en vue de la Conférence des donateurs de Tokyo sur l'Afghanistan.**

**La situation des réfugiés afghans demeure l'une des crises les plus importantes et les plus prolongées du monde en matière de réfugiés.**

La création de moyens de subsistance, le développement économique et la sécurité alimentaire continuent de présenter d'importants défis pour les Afghans et ont ~~nuis~~ au retour des réfugiés afghans. L'insécurité qui persiste dans de nombreuses régions a pour effet d'aggraver la situation des Afghans, et a donné lieu à une augmentation considérable des déplacements internes. En effet, plus de 500 000 Afghans ont été déplacés en raison de la violence.

Conscient de ces défis, le Canada se réjouit de l'engagement continu du gouvernement de l'Afghanistan visant à faciliter le retour sécuritaire et volontaire des Afghans dans leur communauté. Nous exhortons tous les ministères concernés du gouvernement afghan à veiller à ce que les besoins des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées pour leur retour et leur réintégration soient au cœur de leur planification et de leurs programmes.

La Stratégie régionale qui nous est présentée aujourd'hui est ambitieuse. La mise en œuvre de cette stratégie sera étroitement liée à la situation politique, sécuritaire et économique en constante évolution en Afghanistan et dans la région.

Nous avons reconnu le rôle qu'ont joué les États voisins, où les communautés d'accueil et les autorités locales soutiennent les réfugiés afghans depuis plus de trente ans. Celles-ci ont fait preuve de compassion et de générosité à l'égard des réfugiés. S'agissant de l'avenir, le Canada encourage les États voisins de l'Afghanistan à s'assurer que les délais de rapatriement sont réalistes, et qu'ils tiennent compte des défis économiques et sécuritaires auxquels font face les réfugiés afghans qui souhaitent retourner chez eux. Des politiques appropriées devraient être en place pour assurer un soutien continu des populations de réfugiés. Nous encourageons les États voisins à continuer de respecter le principe de non-refoulement et l'importance du retour volontaire et effectué dans la dignité.

**M. le Président,**

Il importe que les Afghans désireux de retourner chez eux et de s'y rétablir puissent continuer à le faire de façon sûre et sécuritaire, et en sachant que leurs droits seront respectés. La promotion de la stabilité et l'accès aux terres, à des moyens de subsistance et à des abris convenables, ainsi qu'aux services de base, tant dans les régions



rurales qu'urbaines, sont des facteurs essentiels pour assurer le retour durable des réfugiés. Ces facteurs doivent donc faire partie intégrante des mesures mises en place.

Pour sa part, le Canada continuera de mettre à profit son expertise et l'expérience qu'il a acquise au cours des dix dernières années en contribuant au renforcement des capacités institutionnelles du gouvernement afghan à fournir des services de base à ses citoyens.

Pour conclure, le Canada demeure déterminé à trouver des solutions durables pour les réfugiés, les personnes déplacées et les rapatriés afghans. Il est prêt à collaborer avec le HCR et ses partenaires internationaux pour y arriver.

FIN



KENYA

**Kenya's comments at the International Conference on the Solutions strategy for Afghan Refugees, to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries**

**2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2012, Geneva, Switzerland**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

1. I thank the Swiss Government and UNHCR for organizing this important meeting. I believe that our deliberations over the next one-and-a-half days will give impetus, towards finding durable solutions to this protracted refugee situation.
2. I commend the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, as well as the UNHCR and other UN agencies involved; for initiating this quadripartite process, which envisions a multi-year approach to the Solutions Strategy.

Mr. Chairman,

3. According to the Global Trends Report 2010, Pakistan and Iran were the top two largest refugee hosting nations. The burden borne by these developing countries is overwhelming. A situation that Kenya understands only too well. We agree with the reflection in the Solutions Strategy that robust burden-sharing must continue, so as to ease the pressure on host countries.
4. Kenya wishes Afghanistan all the best in its re-building efforts and conveys its sincere hope for lasting peace.

5. While we urge the donor community to respond generously to the implementation of the Solutions Strategy, we recognize the harsh economic and financial realities of our times.
6. Finally, Mr. Chairman, this being the first quadripartite, multi-sectoral and multi-year engagement aimed at addressing the world's longest protracted refugee situation, Kenya would be interested in the lessons learnt from this process. I believe they would complement our efforts of seeking a lasting solution to the Somali refugee crisis.

I thank you.

## Statement of the Sweden

International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
2-3 May 2012, Geneva

Mr. Chair, Excellences,

First of all, I would like to thank UNHCR and the Stakeholders for convening this Conference. It is very timely. No less than three major international meetings on Afghanistan will take place in the coming months. Clearly, the country remains at the center of international attention. Both Afghanistan and the wider region face a difficult journey in the years ahead, and we need to carefully consider how to best shape our continued engagement.

Our starting point must be a broad perspective on Afghanistan's challenges. The security, political, governance, human rights and development domains are strongly interlinked. Long-term stability will require regional buy-in with a broad and genuine dialogue covering political and trade as well as social issues. Afghanistan's refugee situation – the longest protracted one in the history of UNHCR – is of course a significant part of this.

Sweden therefore welcomes the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees as a significant step towards a regional approach on how to promote durable solutions for the millions of Afghan refugees that still remain in Pakistan and Iran. We welcome the three pillars – continued support to voluntary repatriation, stronger investments in sustainable reintegration as well as assistance to host communities. We commend the three governments and UNHCR for their efforts in this process.

Certainly, there are issues in the Solution Strategy that will require further attention. Acknowledging and addressing the specific needs and rights of women and children is one issue. Achieving greater clarity on funding arrangements and some of the operational aspects is another. What is important, however, is that we now have a regional framework to proceed from.

Mr. Chair,

Pakistan and Iran have hosted a large part of the Afghan diaspora for more than thirty years. For this, they deserve our appreciation and recognition. In all large scale and

protracted refugee situations, the neighboring countries carry a tremendous burden and face challenging situations.

It is important to support the countries coping with such situations. Resettlement can be one way of several to show concrete solidarity and provide increased protection space. Sweden will continue to provide resettlement in close cooperation with UNHCR. Through our chairmanship in the Contact Group for Strategic Resettlement of Afghan Refugees in Iran, Sweden works together with other states to promote increased opportunities for refugee resettlement. We will also remain a strong supporter of the UNHCR, both financially and with regard to its mandate.

In addressing the Afghan refugee situation, it is imperative to have the full engagement of humanitarian as well as development actors. The Governments, agencies as well as donor countries have a responsibility that this approach will continue through the implementation of the Strategy. Sweden wishes to emphasize the importance of activities that encourage self-sufficiency and local ownership – among returning refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities alike.

Mr. Chair,

Sweden's engagement in Afghanistan dates back many years and is long-term in scope. We are currently increasing the volume of our development assistance, making Afghanistan the largest partner to Swedish development cooperation in 2014. Together with our fellow members of the European Union, we have committed to maintaining the current level of development assistance beyond 2014.

In Bonn, the International Community affirmed that its engagement in Afghanistan will endure. This commitment is, however, also dependent of Afghanistan's own efforts. Afghanistan must continue to strengthen governance, boost its resolve on anti-corruption, follow through on electoral reform, and strengthen the respect for human rights including women's and children's enjoyment of them. The progress made in the last decade must not be jeopardized. The partnership between Afghanistan and the International Community must continue to grow stronger. As we move our cooperation into the *Transformation Decade*, taking the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees forward, these should be our guiding principles.

Thank you!



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

**International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries**

**Geneva, Switzerland**  
**2-3 May 2012**

**AUSTRALIAN STATEMENT**

Thank you Mr Chair.

High Commissioner, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies,

Australia has a long history of assisting refugees and displaced persons. Australia was the sixth country to ratify the Refugee Convention and was a founding member of the UNHCR Executive Committee. Since 1945, Australia has offered over 750,000 people a haven from persecution.

Australia welcomes the support of Iran and Pakistan in hosting large numbers of Afghan refugees over the past three decades, and the continuous efforts of UNHCR to find comprehensive durable solutions for those in the greatest need of protection and assistance. Australia has demonstrated our support for these efforts through programs to assist refugees in Iran and Pakistan and through resettling the most vulnerable refugees and their families in Australia.

We recognise that the large numbers of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, and the internally displaced people within Afghanistan, present one of the most protracted humanitarian issues facing the international community today.

Mr Chairman, Australia appreciates the efforts of UNHCR, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in developing the Solutions Strategy. Without such international solidarity and cooperation the international protection regime could not operate. Australia supports the general intent of the three pillars of the Strategy. We look forward to a clear articulation of linkages between the Strategy and existing and upcoming UN-sponsored processes on Afghanistan, such as the Afghan National Priority Programs and the July 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan.

Mr Chairman, in the spirit of international cooperation, Australia supports the need to focus on improved integration outcomes for returning Afghan refugees. Creating sustainable communities through improvements in livelihoods, basic services and shelter will encourage returnees to remain in

**AUSTRALIA**

Afghanistan and support the increased return of refugees and displaced persons.

Australia recognises that continued voluntary return and sustainable reintegration is important to the overall stability and re-development of Afghanistan. Australia also considers the right of refugees to return to their home countries important for solving protracted situations around the world.

Australia believes that, in certain circumstances, repatriation and resettlement may not be the best solutions for some persons. We welcome the commitment in the draft Joint Communiqué to the principle of asylum for those refugees who cannot yet return to Afghanistan.

Mr Chairman, Australia is committed to rebuilding a stable Afghanistan and has a long history of providing aid and development assistance. As a substantial donor to Afghanistan and to UN organisations like UNHCR, Australia supports vulnerable populations, including returned refugees.

Improving the livelihood opportunities of Afghan refugees and returnees is an important element in assisting sustainable reintegration and addressing irregular movement. Humanitarian funding alone will not resolve the protracted refugee situation facing Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Only through international cooperation between States, UNHCR, civil society and other international organisations can we address this issue.

Australia looks forward to the outcome of Conference discussions and to ongoing discussions on the Strategy and its implementation.

Thank you Mr Chair.





*Il Rappresentante Permanente d'Italia  
presso le Organizzazioni Internazionali*

*Geneva*

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES  
(Geneva, 2-3 March 2012)**

**STATEMENT BY ITALY.**

Mr Chairman,

We are grateful to the Government of Switzerland and to the High Commissioner for Refugees for convening this meeting which focuses on an issue considered very important by Italy. We also thank the esteemed representatives of the three protagonists of this Conference, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, for having presented their approach to the issue of refugees and the “Solution Strategy” resulting from the quadripartite consultation process.

Mr Chairman,

Refugees will not return to their Country, should sufficient conditions of security not be there, should sufficient opportunities of finding a dignified job and sufficient economic resources for their families not be available. We therefore welcome the notion of an “integrated approach” which was mentioned by previous speakers, including the Resident Coordinator this morning. And we are ready to continue to contribute to a National Development Strategy combining both aspects, security and economic rehabilitation of the Country.

Mr Chairman,

2012 will be crucial for Afghanistan and its future. After the commitments agreed in Bonn, we will further discuss in Tokyo in July the development agenda, with a view to shifting to a more mature and equal partnership with Afghanistan.

It must be clear that Italy will not abandon Afghanistan after 2014, in terms of both security and development, trusting at the same time that Afghanistan will do its part on issues such as governance, rule of law, human rights.

In this spirit, on 26 January 2012 Italy signed a bilateral long-term Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, as a tangible follow-up to the Bonn Conference. This agreement will be part of a network of partnership agreements signed by other Countries in order to reassure Afghanistan that they can count on a long-term international support and cooperation.

In the same spirit, I recall that our Prime Minister Monti has just reaffirmed Italy’s long term commitment to stabilization and development of Afghanistan beyond 2014. Our overall effort will certainly include, beside a support to the National Security Forces and military training activity, a consistent commitment to Afghan civil reconstruction and economic development.

We trust that refugees will take advantage of this comprehensive effort, which is meant to contribute to creating adequate conditions on the ground for their early return.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.



## **Statement of Brazil**

### **International Conference on the Solution Strategy for Afghan Strategy**

**2-3 May 2012, Geneva**

Mr. President,

Brazil is pleased to participate in this International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. My delegation thanks Switzerland for hosting such a positive initiative. We commend the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, as well as the UNHCR, for their overall efforts and for arriving at a coherent strategy to address challenges posed by the protracted displacement of afghan refugees. We are encouraged by the unique quadripartite consultative process that led to the "Solutions Strategy".

A durable solution for the situation of Afghan refugees is a key element for regional stability. Brazil supports the commitment of the international community to Afghanistan, enunciated at the Bonn International Conference in December 2011, to remain engaged over the transformation decade from 2015-2024. Redoubled efforts for national reconciliation in Afghanistan, in accordance with its Constitution, are of great importance.

Brazil is of the view that a sustainable peace process in Afghanistan should acknowledge the inter-relation between peace, security and development. Allow me to mention that, at its Fourth Summit, the BRICS countries highlighted that Afghanistan needs time, development assistance and cooperation, preferential access to world markets, foreign investment and a clear national strategy to attain lasting peace and stability. The BRICS affirmed their commitment to support Afghanistan's emergence as a peaceful, stable and democratic state, free of terrorism and extremism, and underscored the need for more effective regional and international cooperation for the stabilization of Afghanistan.

My delegation positively notes that the "Solutions Strategy" mainstreams a development perspective in its support to refugees, returnees and host communities.

Mr. President,

Brazil sees with great concern the protracted nature of the displacement of Afghan refugees. As this situation enters into its fourth decade, it brings negative consequences for the stabilization of Afghanistan.

My delegation highlights the important role played by developing countries in bearing the burden of hosting and assisting refugees all over the world. Brazil has been able to make financial contributions to address the situation of Afghan refugees. In the last three years, Brazil contributed with more than one million US dollars for the Trust Fund for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan and for UNHCR activities in Iran and Pakistan.

My delegation takes this opportunity to announce that Brazil will contribute with additional USD 250,000 for the implementation of the "Solutions Strategy".

We take the "Solutions Strategy" as a central element for the stabilization of Afghanistan and the preservation of the "asylum space" in Iran and Pakistan. We are encouraged by the active participation of the three governments in the initiative. We are confident that this Conference will pave the way for sustained humanitarian and development efforts to address the situation of Afghan refugees.

Thank you.

## Statement of the Saudi Arabia

International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
2-3 May 2012, Geneva

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to begin by joining those who have preceded me in commending the holding of this important Conference to discuss the question of Afghan refugees, which is the principal issue of concern to the international community in this field. I also wish to express gratitude and appreciation to the High Commissioner for Refugees and to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran for their presentation of an integrated strategy for the reception of Afghan refugees. Our gratitude and appreciation are also due to the Swiss Government for hosting this Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

The Kingdom is eagerly awaiting the outcome of this Conference through the strategy presented, which merits our full support since we believe that it has been formulated with great care and we endorse the emphasis that it places on the following three main themes:

- Creating conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation through community-based investments in areas of high return;
- Building Afghan refugee capital based on livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan in order to facilitate return; and
- Preserving asylum space in host countries, including enhanced support for refugee-hosting communities, alternative temporary stay arrangements for the residual caseload and resettlement in third countries.

Mr. Chairman,

The Kingdom supports all the international endeavours to provide assistance for Afghanistan and has always been at the forefront of the States supporting various endeavours to assist Afghanistan and help to meet the needs of Afghan refugees. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the Kingdom has contributed more than US\$ 73 million in governmental assistance including, in particular, waiver of repayment of a previous loan of about US\$ 26 million by the Kingdom to Afghanistan and various types of assistance comprising foodstuffs and humanitarian supplies. The Kingdom has also undertaken to extend soft loans amounting to US\$ 200 million, including a contribution to the funding of road network projects. In addition, the Kingdom has provided more than US\$ 4.5 million in donations from private individuals and associations and is continuing to provide support in every way conducive to the achievement of stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, the Kingdom's delegation hopes that the Conference will produce positive results that can be put into tangible effect for the benefit of Afghan refugees.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**No.GEN/PMI/UNHCR/2012**  
**Permanent Mission of India**  
**Geneva**

**Statement by India**

Mr. Chairperson,

We express appreciation to the organizers including the Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, the UNHCR and the Swiss Development Corporation on facilitating the International Conference on Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees, to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries.

2. After the ouster of Taliban, India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and redevelopment of Afghanistan since 2002. This is based on the understanding that democracy and development are key instruments in ensuring that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability. This has been further manifested through Extensive Developmental Assistance Programme. The Present level of our assistance stands at around US\$ 750 million. All the projects are undertaken in partnership with the Afghan Government in alignment with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy with focus on ownership of assets. Some of the major projects include construction of transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul, humanitarian food assistance of 1 million tonnes of wheat in the form of high-protein biscuits to 1.4 million school-kids daily administered through the World Food Programme, construction of 218 kms. of road, development projects in the power, education and health sectors, construction of the Afghan Parliament, etc. Skills development and capacity building are also ongoing in both university and administrative sectors and vocational sectors. India will also be implementing community-based Small Development Projects in health, education and

community welfare. India's endeavour has been to act in conformity with the best aid effective principles taking into account the local Government's priorities with miniscule proportions of budget being spent on security and salaries.

3. As a neighbor, we believe in constructive engagement in ensuring durable solutions to the issue of protracted refugees, best identified by the Governments concerned in the institutional framework established by them. We reiterate the need for International Organizations and other stakeholders to closely engage and cooperate with the Governments concerned in accordance with established international norms.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

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2 May 2012



## Intervention by Bangladesh Delegation at the Conference on Afghanistan Refugees

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Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Swiss Federal Office for Foreign Affairs and UNHCR for jointly hosting this Conference.

The Government of Bangladesh welcomes the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees that has emerged through a consultative process among the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, as facilitated by the UNHCR.

We believe that the Solutions Strategy is indeed a timely initiative in the backdrop of the evolving political realities and the emerging challenges in Afghanistan.

The Strategy vindicates that if the relevant parties, especially the Governments concerned stand behind and act upon their commitment to address the shared challenges they face, it can help arrive at creative solutions to remove various roadblocks, including the vested interest of different stakeholders engaged in the process.

The Solutions Strategy reaffirms that the principle of non-*refoulement* of refugees should be countervailed with international burden sharing in order to preserve asylum space and to avoid asylum fatigue. The identification of targeted interventions in specific contexts along with the corresponding needs and gaps analysis provides the right orientation for the Strategy to succeed.

We strongly endorse the Strategy's emphasis on voluntary repatriation as the preferred durable solution and the need for creating appropriate development and livelihood opportunities to ensure sustainable reintegration of returnee refugees.

We appreciate that one of the core pillars of the Strategy addresses the issue of enhanced support for the refugee hosting communities with targeted development interventions in and around the refugee-impacted areas. This, in our view, is a critical element to foster the right environment for protection and peaceful coexistence in host countries, as well as voluntary repatriation of the refugees.

We also note with interest the issue of undocumented Afghan migrants being factored into the strategy. We believe that such understanding about the difference in the situation between registered refugees and undocumented migrants should be maintained in the case of other protracted refugee situations.

[At the same time, we agree with the High Commissioner that sustained efforts are required following voluntary repatriation to ensure that today's refugees do not find themselves in a situation of irregular migration tomorrow. As the Strategy rightly acknowledges, sustainable

reintegration through community-based investments and diversified livelihood opportunities would be key to preventing any such unwarranted situation in the long term.]

The effective implementation of the Solutions Strategy would largely depend on an effective resource mobilization strategy underpinned by the spirit of international burden sharing and cooperation. The multi-donor trust fund being established for this purpose should be given utmost priority to generate sufficient commitments and real delivery of resources. We look forward to substantive outcomes in this regard during the upcoming donor Conference and other multi-stakeholder engagements later this year.

We hope that the quadripartite Steering Committee mandated to oversee the implementation of the Solutions Strategy would be able to function in an action-oriented, inclusive and comprehensive manner.

As a close regional neighbour, Bangladesh has been long partnering with Afghanistan to share our home-grown development experiences to help replicate them in the particular social and political context of Afghanistan. A number of Bangladeshi organisations have been contributing to capacity building and investment in women's empowerment, non-formal and primary education, public health and micro-finance led income generating activities. Our Government remains ready to further enhance such cooperation, including in areas of high return for sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

There are important lessons to be drawn from this Solutions Strategy that can be used in a contextual manner to resolve other protracted refugee situations – especially in those where new political developments usher the possibility of renewing efforts to find durable solutions for long-standing refugee populations. We hope that the international community in general, and the parties concerned, in particular, would demonstrate the political will and readiness to seize the opportunity through a similar regional, multi-sectoral and comprehensive strategy, where feasible.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

## Statement of the Republic of Korea

International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
2-3 May 2012, Geneva

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to join other delegations in expressing our deep appreciation to the government of Switzerland and UNHCR for their important and timely initiative to convene this conference. The Republic of Korea wishes to thank the governments and people of Pakistan and Iran for their generous assistance and support provided to millions of Afghan refugees who have stayed in their countries for decades. We also appreciate the hard work and efforts of the three countries and UNHCR in developing the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan refugees*.

Korean government shares the view that it is crucial to enable the sustainable return and reintegration of the refugees through community-based programmes in Afghanistan, while at the same time preserving asylum space and facilitating solutions for registered refugees in the neighboring countries through refugee programme and support to host communities.

My delegation would like to stress the importance of continued efforts to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghan refugees and to support their reintegration in Afghanistan. These efforts will also contribute to reducing the burden of neighboring countries and enhancing stability in the region. In this respect, we recognize the need to invest more resources in improving security situation and creating more job opportunities. This will help returnees remain in Afghanistan and facilitate the increased return of refugees from host countries.

Mr. Chair.

Since 2002 the Korean government has participated in the joint effort of international community to assist people and government of Afghanistan in overcoming their persisting difficulties and building solid basis for peace and development in their country. In particular, Korea has been actively supporting capacity building of Afghan people since setting up a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Parwan province in 2010. The Korean PRT has assisted Afghan local government and people



in their reconstruction works in the areas of education, health and medical service, agricultural development, governance and security.

Korean government attaches great importance to strengthening capacity of Afghan people especially through providing job training in practical areas. For this purpose we are running vocational training centers in Kabul and Bagram, where Korean instructors teach specific job-related knowledge and skills to local Afghans. In addition, we have pledged to provide 500 million US dollars to help strengthen the ANSF and to contribute to Afghanistan socio-economic development.

Mr Chair,

The Korean government will continue to stand with the international community as we stay engaged in Afghanistan. While looking forward seeing more concrete follow-up plan of the Solutions Strategy, my delegation hopes that the experiences and lessons that we have learned in implementing various humanitarian and development projects in Afghanistan would be of use to solve the long standing problems associated with Afghan refugees and returnees.

Thank you

**Statement of the ECO Secretary General, H.E. Mr. M. Yahya Maroofi,  
At the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees  
to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration  
and Assistance to Host Countries**

Geneva, 2- 3 May, 2012

Mr. Chairman,  
High Commissioner,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Secretary-General of the Economic Cooperation Organization which enjoys the membership of the three countries involved in the formulation and drafting of the Solutions Strategy before us today, I am particularly pleased that a holistic approach to the highly urgent and complex issue of voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration of Afghan Refugees and assistance to host countries has been developed. This initiative has been long overdue and we congratulate the High Commissioner for his visionary approach to a problem that has remained on the international agenda for too long and required a comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders.

In early years of 2000, while the architects of the Bonn Agreement concentrated on the political aspects of a post-Taliban era, due attention was not paid to provisions of an environment conducive to the needs of voluntary returnees nor to their effective and sustainable reintegration within their homeland. The magnitude of the task was beyond the resources of organizations such as the UNHCR

and other humanitarian agencies as well as the fledgling interim government of which I was a member, whose major concern was to restore order and confidence and to lay foundations of legal institutions and frameworks for good governance. A nation devastated by over thirty years of conflict and destruction confronted a monumental task of reconstruction and was ill-prepared to successfully meet challenges that major influx of returnees posed. This influx dwindled as the pull-factor diminished primarily due to disenchanted returnees who were unable to re-establish themselves nor benefit from essential services and rights available to other members of the communities to which they returned. The period also experienced donor fatigue and dampened enthusiasm on the part of the international community in the absence of a structured and well-coordinated strategy. The situation today is such that returnees experience great difficulties rebuilding their lives and securing a meager livelihood let alone have the skills and capacity to participate actively in Afghanistan's development. Their situation was further constrained and impacted by insecurity and the rising tide on insurgency. The high percentage of youth among the returnees and their disenchantment may also have contributed to this rising tide. A rise in crime and illicit trafficking of drugs can also be attributed to unemployment and poverty amongst the Afghan refugee population. Both phenomenons constitutes serious concern not only for Afghanistan, but for the region as a whole.

Mr. Chairman,

ECO, an organization dedicated to the social and economic progress of the region in which all three countries affected by the Afghan refugee situation are members, can only successfully attain the objectives of its mandate of regional

growth and development and implement major projects in areas such as trade, transport, energy, agriculture, environment, when situations leading to social unrest and conflict are properly addressed. Consequently both the safe and voluntary return of refugees and their sustainable re-integration of is of paramount importance to our organization as well attending to the needs of the host countries for providing the necessary assistance to Afghan refugees during their temporary stay and facilitating their eventual repatriation.

The Solutions Strategy outlined addresses major concerns of host countries by providing a much needed blue-print to temporarily accommodate the refugee population within their territories and provide them with means and capabilities that would empower them to successfully integrate within the communities to which they return and actively participate in their nation's development. More importantly, the Solutions Strategy provides a framework for a comprehensive and concerted approach to refugee as well as internally displaced persons needs within Afghanistan by major actors within governmental and humanitarian and development agencies as well as principal aid donors involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman,

ECO recently attended the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) in Dushanbe and was pleased by the participation of UNHCR at that important gathering which emphasized the importance it attached to a coordinated approach between humanitarian, regional and development organizations as Afghanistan enters a delicate and critical phase of transition . The integrated framework for multilateral cooperation, coordination and support of



Afghan refugees with a sustained focus on the humanitarian situation will contribute greatly to the efforts of regional organizations such as ECO. We welcome the establishment of the quadripartite Steering Committee to conduct and manage the proposed Multi-donor Trust Fund and will provide whatever assistance within our disposal to assist the UNHCR and other stake-holders to meet the challenges of the Solutions

Strategies envisaged. We trust, Mr. Chairman, that in providing an organizational structure within UNHCR to oversee its implementation the High Commissioner will pay due attention to ensure that staffing and direction employed is sensitive to the region and of the region and does not fall within the current trend of 80 percent of decision-makers within the UNHCR emanating from industrially advanced nations. I make this statement based on my personal experience as a refugee, on my experiences as an international civil servant with IOM responsible for projects involving Afghan returnees, as a cabinet member and as Secretary-General of an organization intricately involved in the activities and concerns of this region.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to conclude by congratulating the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan for the <sup>continued</sup> collaboration and intensive work that has gone into the formulation of this initiative and to wish them every success in its implementation. Allow me also to thank my host country, Switzerland, which has always played an instrumental role in the protection and welfare of refugees world-wide.

*Comment the*

Thank You Mr. Chairman,

1. WFP thanks UNHCR and the Government of Switzerland for Convening this very timely international conference on the solutions strategy for Afghan Refugees. WFP welcomes and supports many of the sustainable, realistic, comprehensive and multifaceted solutions offered by the strategy, particularly those related to food security.
2. Drawing upon one of the strongest operational relationships in the UN system, WFP and UNHCR continue to work closely together in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, as we respond to the food needs of the millions of refugees. For example in Iran, in addition to general food distributions, WFP, UNHCR and BAFIA (Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs) have partnered to increase literacy rates by providing a can of oil to primary and secondary school girls and their female teachers in settlement areas.
3. With regard to the strategy, WFP is pleased that UNHCR has clearly made the link between humanitarian assistance and development, a call that we hear so often today. The strategy brings together all the actors, in all three countries, to find a solution for this protracted situation. The comprehensive and interdisciplinary nature of the paper reflects the complexity and urgency of the issue. This is not a "one issue" situation, but rather a "multi-issue" situation where all our coordinated efforts are needed if we are to enhance sustainability. WFP is pleased that local ownership and empowerment of refugees in many of the projects, especially in Iran is part of the solution; this is yet another "good practice" and another way of ensuring sustainability. Finally, we are pleased that food security is prioritized as one of the key measurable outcome areas. In particular, the strategy seeks to mobilize resources to improve livelihoods and food security, in the affected countries.
4. As raised by several speakers this morning, WFP is concerned that while the strategy proposes reintegration, Afghanistan's internal displacement is on the rise and may not be adequately accounted for in the strategy. At the same time, returnee and non-returnee households are equally vulnerable in Afghanistan, making the exclusive focus on returnees a bit unbalanced. As articulated by Denmark, we would also like to see more urban and semi-urban planning strategies presented in more detail. Finally for Afghanistan, the incorporation of lessons learned, in particular from the "Land Allocation Scheme" is essential to ensure sustainable solutions.
5. In Iran, although WFP welcomes the focus to enhance food security, we are particularly concerned with the rising food prices, which are coupled with the diminishing purchasing power. The strategy does not respond to the lack of targeted cash assistance for refugees, an issue of concern to WFP.

6. Thank you!

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**International conference on the solutions strategy for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries**



**Geneva 2 May 2012**

**ILO statement**

**(check against delivery)**

*Delivered by Alfredo LAzarte Hoyle, Director ILO/CRISIS*

The International Labour Organization welcomes this opportunity to reiterate its support for and commitment to Afghanistan, its people and its future.

The challenges we face to ensure long-lasting peace and progress are daunting. Although the information and data we have on the employment and labour market may not be complete there is no doubt of the reality on the ground: estimates indicate that 7.4 million people are either unemployed or in precarious employment.

Many thousands of Afghans are returning home to a future without decent jobs. Many Afghan women are still unable to access jobs. At this challenging juncture Afghanistan's labour market has a serious need for more and better jobs. If this problem is not addressed it will negatively impact of the country's future stability and development.

To tackle these challenges, the Decent Work Country Program of Afghanistan, developed in 2010, focuses on three priorities:

Productive Employment through the development of Labour Market Information and Skills.

Respect for International Labour Standards that underscore the adherence to internationally-accepted, fundamental principles and rights of all.

Promotion of Social Dialogue as a cornerstone of stronger workers' and employers' organizations in Afghanistan.

ILO and UNHCR have established a decade-long interagency cooperation which evolved into a partnership to support the livelihoods of refugees, returnees and displaced people (a global target population of 37 million people) from 2004 onward. A joint statement of the

two executive heads was signed on 4 November 2004 to mark the importance of this partnership which aims at achieving sustainable livelihoods, better standards of living and poverty reduction, therefore contributing to main millennium development goals.

This partnership is based on the core objectives of the two partner agencies: job creation and decent work opportunities for all, coupled with the protection mandate and the promotion of durable solutions for refugees, displaced people and returnees. Essential ingredients are ILO expertise in livelihoods and sustainable development in parallel with UNHCR relief oriented expertise.

ILO intervenes with specific activities to support reintegration in areas such as: employment-intensive reconstruction, enterprise development, skills development, microfinance, women's economic empowerment, social protection and institutional capacity building.

The ILO and UNHCR have been collaborating in Afghanistan since 2002 for the return, reintegration of temporary migration of Afghan workers and their protection. Presently, the two agencies are preparing to carry out mapping studies in 22 refugees' sites in Afghanistan (the twenty-two sites are located in the provinces of Balk, Bamyan, Farah, Faryab, Hirat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktya and Parwan) to determine employment sustainability of returnees. Based on this assessment, programme interventions will be developed with the aim of creating more productive and decent work for returnees and their families.

The joint strategy comprises coordinated action in Pakistan and Afghanistan for successful voluntary repatriation. In Pakistan the focus would insist on the human capacity and related services enabling refugees' voluntary repatriation and in Afghanistan the focus will be on a successful effort for the reintegration of the returnees.

Two ILO research studies in Quetta and Peshawar already highlight the need for further coordination among all actors for the reintegration of Afghan refugees. The voluntary repatriation of Afghan Refugees requires investing in the human capital and provision of social services to both Afghan Refugees and host communities. The areas in Pakistan affected by the past Afghan refugees as well as those who continue to host Afghan refugees are typically areas with poor infrastructure, acute shortage of basic services and lack of economic opportunities.

As Afghanistan embarks on massive infrastructure and other economic programmes it will need to carefully consider the employment and skills implications, and take measures to maximise the benefits for the Afghan people. Targeted, specified approaches may be needed for young people and women workers, especially for those in the most vulnerable occupations. Community-level local development centered training could be encouraged. This would create more inclusive vocational training projects that meet the needs of individual workers and their enterprises.

The above are just few examples of how the ILO will continue working for a sustainable repatriation and reintegration of the Afghan refugees. This will be possible through renewed efforts and additional support of the international community.

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
ON THE  
**SOLUTIONS STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES TO SUPPORT VOLUNTARY  
REPATRIATION, SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION AND ASSISTANCE TO HOST  
COUNTRIES**  
**2-3 MAY 2012**

## **NGO Statement**

*This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and is delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs and attempts to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.*

*Mr. Chair,*

An estimated four million Afghan refugees still reside in Iran and Pakistan<sup>1</sup>, and constitute one of the largest and most protracted refugee crises in the world. NGOs welcome the effort undertaken foremost by the governments of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, as well as UNHCR, and hope that it marks the beginning of a process in finding durable solutions that take into account the needs and rights of those still displaced.

This conference provides an important opportunity to reflect on the substantial contributions that the neighbouring countries make in hosting large numbers of Afghan refugees; to achieve a shared understanding on the needs of Afghan refugees and returnees; and to further develop the framework for finding durable solutions to their plight. NGOs hope that the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries* will be further developed during, and in particular also following, this Conference. In determining appropriate durable solutions strategies, we call on the concerned governments, donor governments, UNHCR, and other international actors to consult with Afghan refugees and returnees, and respond to the important concerns that they may have.

### **Key Concerns**

With regards to the draft *Solutions Strategy*, a major concern is that the strategy is based on the **premise that a high level of voluntary return will take place**. NGOs believe that returns are unlikely, if not undesirable, at the scale and in the time frame anticipated by the *Strategy* as transition unfolds in Afghanistan over the next few years. The *Strategy* acknowledges some of the difficulties in the areas of return, and NGOs welcome the opportunity for dialogue on how to address the difficulties and on how to take them into account in the search for durable solutions.

With this caveat in mind, the governments of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, as well as donor States and UNHCR must act on their responsibility ensuring that:

- any return of Afghan refugees is **voluntary, safe, dignified, and appropriately monitored**;

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<sup>1</sup> See *Solutions Strategy*, pp. 33, 41.42 for number of unregistered refugees

- discussions on the time line for the return process be linked with sustainable **conditions of return in Afghanistan**, with scenarios in the strategy based on realistic annual planning numbers for return with consideration of a possible increase in insecurity and unpredictability in Afghanistan, as well as the limited absorptive capacity and the actual results of targeted investments in areas of return to date;
- that (potential) **returnees participate meaningfully in these processes and are well-informed** about conditions on the ground before taking decisions to repatriate;
- **asylum space** in host countries is safeguarded; and
- **alternative durable solutions, including local integration and resettlement**, as well as interim stay arrangements, are also prepared for, and presented to, those who may not (yet or may never) be able to return.

### ***Unrealistic expectations of repatriation***

The expectation that the large majority of remaining Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan will repatriate in the framework of the present *Strategy* does not fully take into account a number of elements. The existing security situation, already a serious problem in parts of the country, may further deteriorate. NGOs are concerned about the uncertainties surrounding the transition process during and after the withdrawal of international military forces and the potential for a decreasing security conditions, including in the areas of return.

Any return must also be voluntary, safe, and in dignity. Refugees must be fully informed on the situation in the area of return and on their other options. Any strategy supporting the return and reintegration of refugees should therefore be contextualised and be based on humanitarian motivations.

We are very concerned that some returnees have been receiving incorrect information on situations in their area of return, including housing allocation, job opportunities, and access to health care and education, which were the main drivers for them to return. NGOs are also concerned about a possible reduction of much-needed donor funding during and after the transition phase. Despite great improvements over the last years, the capacity of Afghanistan to absorb returnees remains limited as it continues to see immense conditions of poverty and under-development. When taking these factors into account, there must be realistic and more concrete alternatives for Afghan refugees who are unwilling or unable to return to Afghanistan.

Physical security is a key element for voluntary repatriation to be durable and for returnees to feel safe. NGOs have concerns about approaches that seek to maintain returnees in areas that these populations do not judge secure. The end goal should not be to maintain populations in their areas of origin or in pilot sites that do not reflect the reality on the ground; instead they should be given the choice of their relocation and entitled to the right of freedom of movement and protection.

The **profiles of the current Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran** are markedly different to previous refugee returnee caseloads. A significant portion are living in urban areas (55% in Pakistan and 97% in Iran), a majority were born in exile (66% in Pakistan, upwards of 630.000 Afghan children were born in Iran in the 30 years leading up to 2007<sup>2</sup>), have been in Pakistan and Iran for up to 35 years, and almost half are under the age of 15 in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> Due to the support of the governments of Iran and Pakistan,

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<sup>2</sup> Afghan Embassy in Iran, 2007

<sup>3</sup> PPVR Final Report 2011; BAFIA



many of these refugees have received education. As the *Strategy* observes has been the case with many of those who have already returned, these newer returnees are most likely to find it extremely difficult to reintegrate within Afghanistan in circumstances of deteriorating security, low levels of livelihood opportunities, and poor development indicators. We call on the relevant actors to ensure that the specific needs of this group will be met and to adjust the proposed reintegration into pilot village sites accordingly.

### ***Unfavourable conditions on the ground in Afghanistan***

NGOs appreciate the *Strategy's* referral to the **evolving circumstances in Afghanistan**, and remain very concerned about the growing insecurity and internal displacement, which has reached a record level of half a million. Many of these IDPs are, in fact, returnees who were forced to flee again as they lacked access to basic social services and livelihood opportunities. Given these considerations, NGOs recommend that the *Strategy* is linked to these realities on the ground, and consider the possible unintended consequences of creating model villages, particularly given the problems commonly associated with similar programmes in the past.

The proposed assistance through pilot reintegration sites is **currently targeted to very limited groups**, while an estimated 5.7 million Afghans have returned since 2002 and another 3 million registered refugees remain in Pakistan and Iran. It is important that donors recognise the special needs of returnees and that these needs are taken into account in Afghanistan's development plans. Furthermore, although returnees may have certain specific needs, they are only one category and not necessarily the most vulnerable when compared to recent conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs).

### ***Suggestions where the Strategy can be strengthened***

It is essential for the strategy to incorporate measures required of the Afghan government to **support longer-term reintegration efforts**, including urban planning approaches, land reform, and amendments to *Presidential Decree 104* (on Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Returnees and IDPs) to address the shortfalls in land allocation administration and management. These require substantial levels of political commitment and inter-line ministry coordination and are currently absent in the strategy.

The *Strategy* needs significantly more attention to the inclusion of women and children in both building and benefitting from solutions, including not only in interim and preparatory processes, such as training, but in post-return re-integration and development programmes.

It is also critical for the strategy to **link in existing government and institutional processes**, including National Priority Programmes (NPP), and clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of appropriate line ministries in the selection of more areas of return, the provision of services, etc. This clarity will be necessary in establishing line ministry coordination measures that are required to successfully bridge recovery-development gaps in reintegration support.

The proposed **funding mechanism should be re-assessed** given the concerns listed above and consequent need for a phased support of the reintegration sites based on success, as well as that for including a larger number of refugees, returnees, displaced groups, and host communities through relevant assistance initiatives.

It is essential for the strategy to detail steps needed to **improve the conditions in Pakistan and Iran necessary to support voluntary return**.

There also needs to be a balance with appropriate and effective solutions for those for whom repatriation is not possible. These solutions must be based on a full range of options, taking into account refugees' specific needs. For those who remain in Pakistan in Iran, it is essential to have a timely agreement on interim alternative stay arrangements, including legal asylum and documentation procedures. NGOs call for donors, in the spirit of burden-sharing, to support Iran and Pakistan who have been shouldering a great responsibility to care for the displaced in their countries.

### **Recommendations**

The Solutions Strategy could be greatly improved through the inclusion of triggers or indicators to guide expectations in terms of annual return planning numbers, particularly with respect to realistic scenarios considering security, freedom of movement, basic service support, land tenure, livelihood options and the like.

NGOs call on, and pledge to work with, Iran, Pakistan, and donor countries to support training and education, especially of women leading households, which will help returnees in (re-)establishing livelihoods in Afghanistan. In anticipation of returns, investments are also needed in informing potential returnees about the situation in Afghanistan, as well as – for those born in one of the host countries – familiarisation with the current culture and history of Afghanistan. A dialogue on future scenarios should also be started as soon as possible.

NGOs urge the Government of Afghanistan to fulfil its role as duty bearer, provide basic services, and ensure the safety and security of returnees and IDPs, as well as humanitarian and development operations. NGOs also urge the Government of Afghanistan to support and invest in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) which will shoulder the key role of coordinating and leading the implementation of any return activities and services to IDPs.

NGOs urge the Governments of Iran and Pakistan to:

- Consider the legal right to asylum, including the extension of the Proof of Registration cards in Pakistan;
- Continually assess causes of displacement and new claims for refugee status in Iran, especially given the fluid and developing situation in Afghanistan;
- Consider strategies for the coming years before final return, to support Afghan refugees with the provision of general and free education with the support of the international community, for all children with refugee status, with financial support for Afghans with deteriorating livelihood conditions due to high living costs and inflation;
- Conduct more in-depth needs assessment and research on livelihoods to differentiate groups of Afghan refugees to develop better targeted policies; and
- Continue to honour their tradition of assisting and protecting refugees, with the support of the donor community, while working together to identify durable solutions for refugees.

NGOs urge donor States to:

- Ensure that NGOs, particularly those with local and regional expertise, are recognised and adequately funded partners in the delivery of the solutions strategy;
- Ensure that sufficient resources are made available and strategically prioritised to support both the humanitarian needs of refugee returnees and IDPs, as well as longer-term needs for reintegration and related development needs;

- Ensure that the security implications of the withdrawal of international military forces from Afghanistan are well considered and that the international community plans for the longer-term, continuing to invest in crucial humanitarian, recovery, and development activities; and
- Support to host countries so they can continue support refugee populations in their respective countries.

NGOs urge donor States and UNHCR to:

- Continue advocating for the creation of conditions necessary for durable return, including drawing from previous lessons learned, and upholding humanitarian principles, the internally displaced persons (IDP) Guiding Principles, and International Refugee Law,
- Continue ensuring that all returns are dignified, informed, and voluntary, including ensuring the accurate and timely provision of information about security, services, and conditions in their towns and villages of return to potential returnees;
- To build the capacity of the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees (MoRR) in Afghanistan on providing support and services to their beneficiaries across Afghanistan and to effectively use the resources allocated to them;
- Increase meaningful consultation with Afghan refugees as the primary stakeholders; and
- Increase consultations with NGOs and INGOs working directly with the refugees to help better inform the entire process currently under way.

In conclusion, NGOs stand ready to support efforts that aims at advancing durable solutions, based on full information, voluntariness, and dignity, while protecting the asylum space of those for whom solutions have not yet been found.

*Thank you, Mr. Chair*