

Agenda Item 3 (ii)

Ambassador CHOI, Chairperson of the Executive Committee

Deputy High Commissioner

Distinguished Delegates

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

As every year this session provides us with the opportunity to report on UNHCR's main achievements throughout the continent, and most importantly, to listen to your views and guidance on how to jointly approach persisting challenges and seize existing opportunities.

In 2014, I am confident that we will be able to embrace such opportunities on the occasion of the Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, commonly referred to as the Cartagena+30 process, which will lead to a Declaration and New Plan of Action during the event kindly hosted by the Government of Brazil in early December.

On February 13, the High Commissioner launched the process of consultations with governments and civil society. We will have a unique opportunity to reflect together on the challenges and opportunities for the protection of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons in the Americas and to come up with practical responses and solutions for the next decade.

On the way to Brasilia, there will be sub-regional consultations held in Buenos Aires, Quito, Managua and Port of Spain and. At this early stage, we would like to share with you some of the topics and elements for conversation that may form part of the discussions:

- The strengthening or building of national asylum systems, especially in the Caribbean taking into account the specificities of insular states and maritime movements;
- The development of protection sensitive approaches in situations of mixed migration flows ensuring access to asylum as well as the most adequate treatment for persons of concern with specific needs;
- Considering other alternative solutions for refugees such as labor mobility schemes with protection safeguards as a regional responsibility sharing mechanism, particularly within the MERCOSUR area;
- The eradication of statelessness through continental accession, enactment of legislation on nationality and adoption of statelessness status determination procedures, as well as attention to groups identified as to be at risk.

I encourage delegates to follow the progress of Cartagena + 30 process through regular updates provided by UNHCR in the form of a Newsletter, which first edition is at the back of the room.

Distinguished Chair and Delegates, let me now turn to other important developments in the region. I would like to concentrate primarily on five themes.

I would like to start by touching upon the **right to asylum and the enjoyment of refugee rights**. Let me stress the importance of the Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI) to strengthen and harmonize refugee status determination in the region. QAI programs are currently being implemented in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama. Their implementation has confirmed that this methodology, which allows for governments to review and strengthen their processes and procedures, is useful.

Positive legislative changes and alignments with international standards were recorded in the region. Mexico withdrew its reservation to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Upon invitation by the Colombian Government, UNHCR Colombia is in the process of giving technical advice on the legislative revision of procedures for refugee status determination.

Building on the momentum created by the Regional Conference on the Protection of Vulnerable Persons in Mixed Migration Flows in the Caribbean, States have agreed to enhance cooperation, as well as national and regional capacities, and to explore in solutions.

The mainstreaming an **Age, Gender and Diversity sensitive approach** to planning and implementation, the Bureau for the Americas has included AGDM is one of the five Bureau's priorities for the region and guided by an AGDM forward action plan. A regional compilation of good practices has been also produced.

Particular follow-up has been dedicated to the design, finalization and implementation of SGBV strategies in the region. UNHCR undertook missions to several countries in the region, with particular focus on the protection of LGBTI.

An important matter of concern is **displacement due to non-conflict related violence**, which is particularly affecting the Northern triangle of Central American countries, but is certainly impacting also on transit or receiving countries such as Mexico, the United States of America and Canada.

As mentioned in the situational update that was circulated, there is growing concern that the violence inflicted by gangs and transnational organized crime is forcing persons in Central America to move. Persons fleeing the new forms of violence are increasingly filing asylum claims in countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico, USA and Canada. UNHCR, upon request of the Government of Honduras and in close coordination with ECHO, the civil society and the academia, has initiated the analysis and monitoring of displacement in order to determine its magnitude and to establish profiles of the affected population.

A study on the protection needs of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) who were apprehended while travelling between the US and Mexico border, was concluded at the end of 2013 and presented recently to government officials of concerned countries. The study is based on interviews with more than 400 children, 63 percent of them resulted to be in need of international protection.

Let me now touch briefly upon the Americas' contribution towards the **prevention of statelessness**

In 2013, Jamaica, Nicaragua and Peru have joined the efforts to eradicate Statelessness by acceding to one or both of the relevant instruments. Other countries are at different legislative stages towards the adoption of one or both conventions on statelessness.

UNHCR is confident that the Dominican Government's recent announcement to find a suitable solution to those cases that were impacted by the Constitutional Court Ruling of September 2013, will prevent and solve any situation of statelessness. We, as the rest of the UN system, remain ready to provide the required technical and legal advice and all other support that is needed to this effect.

Let me conclude Mr. Chairman, with a few words on the **Colombia situation**.

The current talks between the Government of Colombia and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) that could lead to an end to the decades-long conflict in the country, give us all a reason to hope and raise expectations for solutions to displacement. We very much welcome the agreements reached in two of the six points on the negotiator's agenda (rural development and political participation) and reiterate our disposal to contribute to future implementation of a peace process, in any way the Government would find useful, in particular when the issue of the rights of victims will be dealt with. Together with our government counterparts, UNHCR remains vigilant of persisting protection needs of those at risk of further displacement

or those who are regrettably still displaced. In 2013, the Victims Unit registered some 115.000 new IDPs. This figure includes 7000 families affected by 100 large group displacements. The cumulative number of IDPs in the country, issued by the Victim's Unit, is of 5.368.138.

As we will show in a short video on the Transition Solutions Initiative in Colombia, UNHCR and UNDP have joined the Colombian government in developing a methodology and strategy for solutions. This has resulted in concrete changes in 17 communities.

Let me add that we are extremely pleased to have her Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Ms. Holguin with us today.

Neighboring countries were also at the heart of our joint efforts to protect and find solutions to the plight of refugees. In 2013, UNHCR, in close collaboration and with the full support of the Ecuadorian Government, has developed a Comprehensive Solutions strategy. Within a time-frame of three years, the strategy will identify sustainable local integration opportunities, including through naturalization, increase in resettlement, use of advantageous regional human mobility schemes, as well as exploring the voluntary repatriation for more than 57,000 Colombian refugees.

In Panama, this year, the government through the granting of permanent residence and work permits, will finalize the migratory regularization of some 400 Colombians who have been living in Darien province under Temporary Humanitarian Protection since the late 90's.

Thank you Mr Chairman for this opportunity to present a short overview of the main issues that characterized UNHCR's work in the Americas and to express the hope that we can work together to move forward the regional protection and solution agenda. We are looking forward to any comment, question or advice that this distinguished audience may have.