

**Statement by the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the 67th Session of the Executive
Committee of the UNHCR**

Good morning and a warm welcome to the meeting from Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago takes this opportunity to thank UNHCR for inviting us to this Executive Committee meeting and offers its congratulations to Mr. Fillippo Grandi on his appointment as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The twin island developing state of Trinidad and Tobago, a country of 1.3 million people, situated just 7 nautical miles north of Venezuela is regarded as one of the more advanced and stable countries of the Caribbean region.

The country experiences mixed migration movements, and is considered both a transit and destination country to various categories of people on the move, including economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and victims of human trafficking.

Cognizant of the need to offer protection to vulnerable populations, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 2000, and is also signatory to the United Nations (UN) Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and supplementing conventions, and the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

While the government has made great strides in enacting legislation and implementing measures to combat trafficking in persons, the country does not at this time have refugee legislation; this has hindered the application of proper protection principles for refugees and asylum seekers.

Trinidad and Tobago receives the second largest number of asylum seekers in the region, after Belize, and has been experiencing increases in arrivals of persons of concern. This is evident

by the data which highlights that forty-three (43) asylum seekers were recorded in 2013, while three hundred (300) have been recorded as at September 2016. Records indicate that these persons originate from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America.

Previously, ad hoc procedures had been in place to treat with asylum seekers which saw UNHCR and its honorary liaison, the Living Waters Community conducting RSDs with little involvement by government agencies. The government has sought to address this situation through the development of a National Policy to Address Refugee and Asylum Matters in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, adopted by Cabinet in June 2014.

The Policy provides for a phased approach to the development of a RSD mechanism and promotes the transition from UNHCR leading the RSD procedure to the government of Trinidad and Tobago taking full responsibility. It includes capacity building, the adoption of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the enactment of legislation and the creation of a Refugee Unit within the Immigration Division.

This phased approach was the result of cooperation with the UNHCR and aligns with international best practice.

Trinidad and Tobago is currently in the first phase of policy implementation. Capacity building has been taking place with UNHCR facilitating training in international refugee law. Through a collaboration between UNHCR and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), relevant officers participated in the USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations (RAIO) Combined Training and the Asylum Division Officer Training Course (ADOTC) in 2014.

Training has also been provided in UNHCR's ProGres v4 database for the registration of asylum seekers and refugees.

To ensure a fair and robust mechanism is developed, discussions have been held between the Ministry of National Security and the Regional Senior RSD Officer and the Regional RSD

Consultant on implementing a Quality Assurance Initiative from the start; considered as a best practice tool in this regard.

As part of our commitment to the principle of responsibility-sharing, the government of T&T has facilitated a Refugee Transfer Mechanism enabling refugees from neighbouring islands to come to Trinidad and Tobago to finalise their resettlement to an accepting country.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been working assiduously to protect and promote the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families and continues to revise its policies and legislation in order to meet the demands of a global population on the move, while pursuing its own national security interests.

We are committed to partnering with UNHCR in treating with asylum seekers and refugees. It is hoped that this partnership provides an invaluable example to the region as the Caribbean confronts this emerging issue.

We thank UNHCR for its unwavering support as Trinidad and Tobago implements its national mechanism.