

United States
EXCOM HLS STATEMENT

Delivered by Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration
Anne C. Richard
October 6, 2015

It's a pleasure to be here. I was here for the inauguration of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees back in May of 2012, so it is good to be here now as we take stock of how it has fared.

But before I continue, allow me – on behalf of the American people – to extend my deepest condolences to the medical professionals and other civilians killed and injured in the tragic incident early Saturday morning at a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz. The United States Department of Defense has launched a full investigation. On behalf of the President Obama and the First Lady, I offer our thoughts and prayers to all of the civilians affected by this incident, their families, and loved ones.

Mr. Chairman,

In the intervening years, Afghanistan has experienced both triumphs and set-backs. It has managed an important election and a peaceful transition of power, formed a National Unity Government, and steadily implemented reforms to combat corruption. However, Afghanistan has also suffered frustrations and ongoing insurgency, including the recent assault on Kunduz. Through all these highs and lows, the international community has been right beside the Afghan people, assisting them to move forward into the future.

For many years, the United States has made it a priority to support Afghans who are returnees, refugees, and displaced throughout the region. Over the last decade, we have provided over \$400 million to UNHCR to help build shelters, educate

children, and support health care for Afghan refugees and returnees. In this fiscal year, we have contributed \$48 million to UNHCR to continue helping displaced Afghans. Since 2007, the United States has also resettled nearly 5,000 Afghan refugees in America.

The Government of Afghanistan is taking positive steps to follow through on its commitment to the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)*. It has a vision of what it must do to enable displaced Afghans to return to home communities, and to fold them into its national development plans. President Ghani has demonstrated his strong commitment by chairing the Afghan government's High Commission for Refugee Affairs starting this past June. This forum promotes action across different ministries to benefit Afghan returnees. We support both the High Commission for Refugee Affairs and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) in their vital work and encourage their efforts to adopt reforms and promote transparency.

Over the past decade, nearly six million refugees have gone back to Afghanistan, a testament to their belief in the country's future. A steadfast commitment by the Government to will be essential if returning Afghans are to be to successfully reintegrated. The international community and the Government of Afghanistan share the goal of making Afghanistan a place, where former refugees can rebuild their lives; where the internally displaced can find a safe, dignified place to settle and thrive, and where all Afghans can contribute to the hard work of rebuilding their nation.

My government is also committed to aiding the 2.5 million Afghans who cannot yet return home. The majority of these refugees have resided outside of Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion three decades ago. Despite some daunting

challenges, both Pakistan and Iran seek to fulfill commitments to the principles of asylum and voluntary repatriation. They have protected refugees from forced return for decades. As we have seen in recent days, changing battle lines and an active insurgency may displace civilians, even as others are able to go home. We ask Pakistan and Iran to allow Afghan refugees to stay within their borders until they can return home voluntarily, safely, and with dignity.

Related to this, we ask Pakistan to renew Proof of Registration cards for 1.5 million Afghan refugees before the end of this year. For its part, the international community must help Pakistan protect, care for, and create opportunities for Afghan refugees. The U.S. government continues to demonstrate its unwavering commitment to the SSAR by supporting the the Refugee Affected and Hosting Area (RAHA) program. RAHA supports the objectives of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees by helping Pakistani communities that have so generously hosted Afghan refugees. At the same time, refugees also benefit from this program while they are in Pakistan. The program has further dividends when they return to Afghanistan, when they put their education and training to use in rebuilding their own country.

The United States contributed nearly \$9 million to UNHCR for RAHA last year, and RAHA is using the money to implement 39 projects that benefit 48,000 Afghan refugees and hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis in the communities that host them. The United States is also supporting ten non-governmental organizations that provide separate education and skills training services to Afghan refugees.

I want to tell you about two of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan who have benefitted from these programs. Ibrahim and his family of eight were living in

Mazdoor Abad and just scraping by when he started a vocational training program in welding. He says the course taught him more skills in just six months than he might have taken a lifetime to learn, otherwise. Now he has opened a successful welding shop with his brother.

In rural Baluchistan, Natasha's family was desperate. Her husband's small business was failing and she was struggling to care for four children and her in-laws. Then she was accepted into a U.S.-funded vocational training program in dress design. When she graduated, she opened a boutique and became an instant success, with customers as far away as Quetta, supporting her own family and helping others. She started teaching classes to girls in her rural community.

Natasha says, "Hundreds of women are out there aspiring to start their own work, but they need proper guidance, training and skills. I want to see them succeed." She says she wants women to build self-esteem and to understand "what they are capable of."

Since 2009, more than ten million people like Ibrahim and Natasha have benefitted from these RAHA projects. Other U.S.-funded RAHA projects work to improve health, including reproductive health care, sanitation and hygiene, and provide clean drinking water for refugees and local communities alike.

This is all possible because of the enduring cooperation among the United States and other donor governments, the government of Pakistan, implementing agencies, and beneficiaries. If Afghanistan is to recover from years of conflict, it needs the international community to continue its robust support for Afghan refugees. It needs Iran and Pakistan to continue providing a safe haven to refugees. And it needs to continue cooperating with partners to create opportunity and hope that will enable more refugees to return.

H:\PRM Offices\ECA\API - South Asia Region\Afghanistan Pakistan Iran
FY2015\BCLs, Memos, Readouts\2015-09-23 EXCOM HLS REMARKS.docx

Approved: PRM/FO Nizzo Jackson

Drafted: PRM/MCE Kathy Schalch and PRM/ECA Emily Mestetsky 3-9282 and
cell 202-578-2316

Cleared:

PRM/MCE: MPollack (ok)

PRM/ECA: JNoronha (ok)

PRM/A: KGauger (ok)

PRM/PRP: SMitchell (ok)

D: YGonzalez/SGilbert (ok)

P: Eandersen (ok)

S/P: MKimmagine (ok)

J: TSaha (ok)

F: LTafaraMaddox(ok)

SRAP/A: CGarner (ok)

SRAP/P: LRitzinger (ok)

NEA/I: ENorris (ok)

Refugee Coordinator Islamabad: SKhilji (ok)

Refugee Coordinator Kabul: LHoover (ok)

