



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
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**High Commissioner's Opening Statement to 61st Session of Excom  
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Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies. May I express my very deep gratitude and appreciation for your leadership and support. Thank you very much on behalf of UNHCR.

In December of this year, UNHCR will mark its 60th birthday. Next year we will celebrate that same anniversary for the 1951 Refugee Convention, as well as the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. We will also mark 150 years since the birth of the first High Commissioner for Refugees at the League of Nations, Fridtjof Nansen.

All these anniversaries present an opportunity to broaden and renew support for the principles of international protection upon which our work depends.

I am thus delighted to welcome you all to this 61st session of UNHCR's Executive Committee.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this first Excom since being re-elected in April, I would like to begin my remarks by exploring the increasing resilience of conflict and its implications for our work.

Last year was the worst in two decades for the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Only approximately 250,000 returned home. And that is about one quarter of the annual average over the past ten years.

And there is a simple explanation for this. The changing nature and the growing intractability of conflict make achieving and sustaining peace more difficult in today's world.

Traditionally, UN and regional peacekeeping missions were deployed when arms had fallen silent. Missions operated with the consent of the parties and their objectives were generally limited to stabilizing situations so peace could be consolidated.

Today's "blue helmets" face a different reality. They are often deployed while violence is still going on, in internal conflicts characterized by a multiplicity of actors, a proliferation of weapons and, inevitably, widespread banditry.

Distinctions between military and non-military spheres have become blurred. As a result, both civilians and the humanitarians trying to help them, end up being targeted. And this is why we continue to insist on the need to preserve the autonomy of humanitarian space. Respect for the principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality remains the best guarantor of the security of humanitarian staff.

At the same time, a number of states are signaling a growing discomfort with peacekeeping operations in their territories. Concerns about national sovereignty are increasingly translating into the rejection of international presence. The requests earlier this year to drawdown MINURCAT in Chad and MONUC in the Democratic Republic of Congo are cases in point.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The growing resilience of conflict is typified by the situations in Afghanistan, the DRC, or Somalia.

None of these conflicts is new. We have seen fighting in Afghanistan on and off for decades. The DRC has been in almost continual conflict since 1998. And Somalia's troubles have thrived on the absence of an effective central government since 1991.

In this context, I would like to say a few words on the future of peacekeeping and peace building strategies.

I am encouraged by the efforts being made and DPKO's engagement with a comprehensive review of the peacekeeping concept.

It is by now a cliché that peacekeepers can be sent to places where there is no peace to keep. Their already difficult tasks are sometimes rendered impossible by unrealistic or contradictory objectives.

Clarity and consistency are the basic pre-conditions of an achievable mandate. For years, MONUC – now MONUSCO - was simultaneously asked to protect civilians and support the Congolese army in actions against rebel groups. However, the behaviour of that army represented one of the biggest threats to the populations MONUC was supposed to protect.

No one-size-fits-all model of peacekeeping will serve the needs of this decade. In some situations, we will need robust forces empowered to enforce peace. In others, a lighter footprint and carefully calibrated mandate will be needed, focusing on the protection of civilians and the preservation of humanitarian space.

And in all cases, the withdrawal of peacekeepers needs to be part of a responsible exit, ensuring the conditions are in place for security and durable peace.

As the Afghanistan Compact recognizes, security cannot “be provided by military means alone. It requires good governance, justice and the rule of law, reinforced by reconstruction and development. [And] the support of the international community.”

Achieving these things is obviously beyond the mandate of UNHCR. They require a comprehensive peace building strategy of which we are only a small part. Nevertheless, refugees’ participation in peace negotiations is an essential component of their success.

Our primary interest and role is helping to bring about the conditions which will allow refugees to return and reintegrate in their home countries. UNHCR’s “peace villages” initiative in Burundi or cooperation with the Ministry of Justice in Liberia for the more effective prosecution of sexually and gender-based crimes are two such examples.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a result of never-ending conflicts, we are witnessing the creation of a number of quasi-permanent, global refugee populations, of which Afghans and Somalis are the most obvious.

When they venture beyond their immediate neighbours, they are increasingly likely to be confronted by states hostile to their arrival.

The vast majority of Afghan refugees, 96 percent of the total, reside in the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran. And both countries have demonstrated --and continue to demonstrate-- extraordinary generosity.

Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees --currently numbering 1.7 million-- for thirty years. Even the massive displacement resulting from the calamity of the recent flooding has not imperiled their welcome.

Prioritizing support for the conditions that will allow voluntary return, the Pakistani Government recently announced its Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees, which UNHCR is helping to implement. It foresees the replacement and extension of the Proof of Registration cards for Afghan refugees and the provision of an estimated 200,000 new cards to unregistered family members. As many as one million birth certificates are to be issued to registered Afghan children and profiling is being undertaken to identify individuals with specific protection needs, as well as the feasibility of alternative status options, such as work and study permits.

In Iran, the more than one million Afghan refugees are permitted to remain on the basis of regularly conducted registrations. Based on a Presidential Decree issued last year, all Afghan children, whether refugees or not, are allowed to go to school. Pending their eventual voluntary return, Iran has since 2009 issued over 300,000 work permits to Afghan refugees in the country. And together with UNHCR, the Government is exploring other measures to increase the availability of sustainable livelihoods.

But ladies and gentlemen,

Beyond Pakistan and Iran, Afghan refugees are today dispersed across 69 other countries – a third of the states in the world.

With insecurity in many parts of Afghanistan worsening and poor economic and educational prospects, Afghan youth in particular are fleeing or seeking opportunities elsewhere.

In 2009, more than 6,500 Afghan minors --mostly boys-- applied for asylum in Europe. This represents about half of all the asylum applications made in Europe last year by unaccompanied children. But many more Afghan youth were on the move but simply did not apply for asylum.

The risks to which these young travelers are exposed are extreme.

Earlier this year, UNHCR produced a report entitled *Trees only move in the wind*, which is based on interviews in six European countries with 150 Afghan boys between the ages of 9 and 18. The report describes the dangers they encountered at every stage of a journey that takes months or even years.

These youngsters told of being mistreated and forcibly separated from family members by smugglers.

Of being detained, beaten and deported by the police in countries along their route.

Of being held as forced labourers or passed on by traffickers, when their money ran out.

They told of fellow travelers suffocating in the backs of trucks and drowned at sea – sometimes due to the deliberate sinking of their boats.

Many slept rough and went without food or access to proper sanitation or medical care, even after arriving in Europe.

No one should have to endure these conditions - certainly no child. All minors need to be provided with safe shelter, food, medical care, a chance to go to school, and a qualified guardian.

Many Afghan children and youth receive asylum or are allowed to remain in the countries where they sought protection on humanitarian grounds. Others, however, are less fortunate. With those minors in mind, UNHCR recently outlined the safeguards it believes need to be in place before the return of minors to Afghanistan is considered.

At a minimum, any decision concerning the return of an unaccompanied minor has to be based on a formal procedure taking into account their best interests. Family tracing

needs to be undertaken and arrangements for reception, care and guardianship, as well as a plan for the future of the minor, need to be in place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Of the nearly 700,000 Somali refugees in the world at the end of 2009, approximately half were in Kenya and a quarter in Yemen, with increasing numbers in Ethiopia and Djibouti. Every month, approximately 8,000 more flee the country.

Today, we see Somali refugees everywhere – another truly global refugee situation.

I do not believe there is any group of refugees as systematically undesired, stigmatized and discriminated against as Somalis.

Some Somalis have been deported to Mogadishu – a capital subject to nearly continual shelling, from which more than 200,000 people have fled just in 2010.

Many have perished in deserts or been shot trying to cross borders.

They can be targeted for recruitment by parties to the conflict and have in many places been subjected to security crackdowns and roundups, and xenophobic and racist attacks.

No one for sure knows how many have drowned trying to reach safety in the Arabian Peninsula or elsewhere.

A particularly moving account of the so-called “million shilling” voyage across the Gulf of Aden is given by Alixandra Fazzina in her photo book of the same title. Ms. Fazzina, as you may know, is the winner of this year’s Nansen Award, which will be presented in a ceremony this evening.

When they reach safety, some Somali refugees still go without food, shelter and other assistance.

It is difficult to paint a picture more dire than that of the Somali refugee.

At present, there seems no real prospect of peace in Somalia. In the absence of a political breakthrough, Somalis will continue to wander the world in search of safety and a chance to rebuild their lives.

I appeal to you to provide these vulnerable people with protection, in line with the updated eligibility guidelines we issued earlier this year.

And I also repeat the plea I made at the end of July to refrain, in the current environment, from enforcing returns to Mogadishu. Mogadishu, obviously, is not a place we can ask people to call home.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Somalis are by no means the only refugees unable to repatriate due to the persistence of conflict.

Over half of the refugees for whom UNHCR is responsible live in protracted situations. There are 25 such situations today, in 21 countries.

And this burden is borne disproportionately by the developing world, where four-fifths of all refugees live. Combined with the continuing impact of the global financial and economic crisis, the resources of host countries and host communities are under serious strain.

Pakistan has 745 refugees per 1 US dollar of GDP per capita. By way of contrast, the most heavily burdened country in the developed world is Germany, with 17 refugees per 1 US dollar of GDP per capita.

Through the Refugee-Affected and Hosting Area Programme (RAHA), UNHCR works with the Government of Pakistan, UNDP and development agencies to promote harmonious co-existence between Pakistani and Afghan communities by strengthening governance and public service delivery. But undoubtedly important, this program represents only a modest response to very profound needs.

And even after refugees have repatriated, the areas in which they used to live often require rehabilitation. Our efforts with partners to bring about orderly camp closure and to rehabilitate affected land, for example, in Ethiopia and Uganda, have been limited. Such efforts need to be expanded, and to become the norm rather than the exception.

A better understanding and recognition by the international community of the efforts of host countries is absolutely necessary. I have asked our Policy Development and Evaluation Service to commission an independent study to measure the economic and social impact of hosting refugees, including, as far as possible, its financial quantification. This is the kind of donorship we need to be much better able to recognize and appreciate.

In the meantime, we need to increase international solidarity and burden-sharing. As partners in UNHCR's initiative on protracted situations have observed, each case needs a comprehensive approach, with solutions tailored to the circumstances of the refugees, their host countries, and their countries of origin.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Resettlement is a tangible and effective example of burden-sharing. It allows refugees who cannot find safety or a durable solution in their first country of asylum to take up residence in another country.

We are working hard to enhance resettlement. UNHCR made resettlement submissions for over 128,000 refugees in 2009 - more than double the number of

2005. The number of departures – that is, of refugees who traveled to their new homes – was also up, to just under 85,000.

Since June 2008, 12 new countries have established resettlement programs and the total number worldwide now stands at 24, with the US, Australia, and Canada still clearly leading. An emergency transit centre was established in Romania last year and transit support was also provided by the Philippines and Slovakia.

But a huge gap remains between resettlement needs and resettlement capacity. We estimate that as many as 800,000 refugees need resettlement, yet the number of places available annually is only around 10% of that, and less than 1 percent of the total number of refugees in the world – like it was largely discussed in our last consultations with resettlement countries and host countries.

Resettlement is a critical protection tool but also a strategic instrument for unblocking refugee situations of long duration. Nepal is a case in point. I appeal to countries to establish or expand their resettlement programs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite the lower number of refugees able to return to their countries in conditions of safety and dignity last year, voluntary repatriation remains the preferred and vital solution. Indeed, with major conflicts failing to resolve, it becomes all the more important to act on the opportunities for voluntary return which do exist.

Only with resettlement and voluntary return maximized, and a more equitable sharing of the responsibility for hosting refugees, can we hope to see more receptivity to local integration.

In this regard, I would like once again to acknowledge the profound generosity of the United Republic of Tanzania in granting naturalization to more than 162,000 Burundian refugees in the country since 1972. Those were the last images of our film [screened at the outset of today's meeting]. Images of hope. Tanzania needs and deserves our common, strong support.

UNHCR's Global Plan of Action on protracted situations, released last year, also emphasizes the importance of increased assistance to refugees for education and self-reliance. And particularly, for secondary education and vocational training with job opportunities whenever possible associated, as it is really impossible to go on witnessing the fate of young people in refugee camps having nothing to do and becoming easy prey for recruitment, crime or even for other forced activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Prevention of statelessness is an integral part of UNHCR's mandate.

At the end of 2009, there were 6.6 million persons around the world known to be stateless, though unofficial estimates range as high as 12 million.

Important efforts have been taken recently by a number of states to improve their national laws to reduce the risk of statelessness. Viet Nam has naturalized a first group of stateless former refugees from Cambodia and revised its legislation to make naturalization for stateless persons and the re-acquisition of nationality by former citizens easier. A number of other countries improved their birth registration systems, a matter of critical importance to prevent statelessness.

Bangladesh and Zimbabwe introduced reforms recognizing the right of women to confer nationality on their children on an equal basis with men. Kenya's new constitution grants women equality with men in this regard. A similar reform is pending in Tunisia. In a number of other countries, however, women remain unable to pass their citizenship on to their children. And UNHCR is organizing a major effort in 2011 to advocate for legislative reforms so that mothers and fathers are equally able to pass their citizenship on to their children. And I call on all states to support us in this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidance and the humanitarian reform process, UNHCR is also at the forefront of the international community's response to people displaced within the borders of their own countries as a result of conflict.

There are an estimated 27 million persons internally displaced by conflict in the world today. For many years now, the majority of the world's uprooted have been displaced within their own countries. The primary responsibility for responding to situations of internal displacement rests with states. But in many cases, however, the challenge of responding is simply overwhelming.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to recall the adoption last year at the African Union Special Summit in Kampala of the Convention on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa – an extremely important instrument. I heartily encourage countries to ratify this instrument.

At the global level, the response of the humanitarian community to internal displacement continues to evolve. New forms of cooperation and partnership are developing among the three pillars of the Global Humanitarian Platform, the UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and national and international NGOs.

And as you know, in this context, UNHCR has assumed responsibility for leading the response to conflict-induced internal displacement in the areas of protection, shelter and camp management.

But for people displaced internally by natural disasters, UNHCR was tasked by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to assume the lead for the protection cluster at the global level, but a gap remains at the country level.

With natural disasters becoming more frequent and more severe, an ad hoc approach to the leadership of the protection cluster at country level is, in my opinion, no longer sustainable.

I believe that UNHCR should, in the context of the inter-agency approach, be able to fill the gap.

But I am also aware of the concerns expressed by member states in relation to our capacity to do so, without undermining our mandate operations. Accordingly, I fully agree, a clear set of conditions should govern UNHCR's assumption of this additional responsibility.

First, UNHCR would only become involved with the clear consent of the state concerned.

Second, our involvement would only be undertaken if requested by the Humanitarian Coordinator, and in close consultation with the Government and relevant partner agencies.

Third, resources for responding to natural disasters would not come at the expense of UNHCR programmes for refugees and stateless persons. In relation to financial aspects our budget structure ensures this. Nor would we allow it to come from programmes for conflict-induced internally displaced people. Before UNHCR took on its more predictable role with them, there was a concern that resources for responding would be diverted from refugees. The evidence to date is that this is not the case. In fact, our more predictable role with people forcibly displaced internally has increased synergies making in the end more resources available to the organization for all persons of concern, including refugees. And in relation to staff capacity, we have a very meaningful programme of stressing our own protection capacity in order to be able to fully comply with this challenge.

Finally, consistent with past practice and common sense, the way we engage would be influenced by whether or not we have a presence in the country concerned.

Where we have an operational presence, and especially in countries which host large numbers of refugees, it would be unconscionable not to extend our assistance to these host populations when they are themselves displaced by a natural disaster. This is what guided our responses in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Somalia to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004, to the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, or now to the massive displacement caused by the flooding.

Where we do not have an operational presence and another agency already leads a protection coordination mechanism or is willing to do so, that should be the solution. This was the case in Haiti. Our involvement will never come at the expense of the

protection capacity of other actors. If no other agency is willing to assume the leadership of the protection cluster, then UNHCR, at the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator, and with the agreement of the state concerned, could then be prepared to fill the gap, deploying an emergency response team without delay, as we did in the Philippines.

In October last year, in response to flooding in the northern part of the Philippines, UNHCR was asked by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to establish and lead the protection cluster. And based on the evident utility of the activities undertaken, we were subsequently invited by the Government to establish a presence to bolster the protection response to people displaced by conflict in Mindanao.

And for the sake of certainty, allow me to make clear what UNHCR is NOT proposing. We are not suggesting a change in UNHCR's mandate or an expanded role for UNHCR in any of the clusters where leadership is already clear. But we believe it is our duty, when and if necessary, to support Governments with our expertise in areas such as registration and documentation, the identification of vulnerable people, or the response to sexual and gender-based violence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my address last year, I reported in detail on UNHCR's ambitious program of internal reform. I do not propose to do so again but would like to highlight some of the key results.

In 2005, prior to the reform, we had approximately 1,000 staff in Geneva, and nearly 7,100 worldwide with a total expenditure of about 1.1 billion US dollars.

Today, we have 695 staff in Geneva, about 7,200 worldwide and the total volume of our activities in 2009 was 1.75 billion dollars. In other words, we have increased our operations by 60 percent with approximately the same number of staff worldwide and 30 percent fewer in Geneva.

Increased efficiency translates into more resources for the people we care for. Savings in budgeted staff costs, for example, allowed us to address critical gaps in the areas of sexual and gender-based violence, malaria, malnutrition, reproductive health and water and sanitation.

But the process has not been without its hurdles, and a few reforms are still in progress. Chief among these is resolving interface problems between our key software tools, Focus and MSRP, in order to be able to fully exploit the potential of Results Based Management. And one of the lessons we have learned from the difficulties we have encountered is that we should not again develop complex software products in-house.

To minimize risks to the implementation of the original comprehensive reform package, IT services were then not included. The time has now come for the restructuring of the Division of Information Systems and Telecoms, not only to address

my observations about the development of software, but also including the decentralization of a number of services to bring them closer to the point of delivery in different continents of the world.

Most of UNHCR's human resource policy initiatives have been implemented. Due to the sensitive character of reforms to assignments, promotions, contracts and recruitment, we placed a premium on achieving these through dialogue between staff and management. Following agreement in the Joint Advisory Committee, a new assignments policy was adopted in June. Discussions are well advanced on the related policy for promotions, and will be followed by conversions of local staff and external recruitment. Modifications to the rules governing the eligibility of JPOs and UNVs to apply for positions as internal staff members have already been implemented. And delays in the adoption in New York of a new UN contracts policy have led us for the moment also to postpone our own process.

As many member states have urged, we are in the process of establishing a fully Independent Advisory and Audit Committee to replace our current Oversight Committee.

And the new Deputy High Commissioner, Alexander Aleinikoff, arrived in February and is overseeing these efforts. Together with the Assistant High Commissioners for Protection and Operations, Erika Feller and Janet Lim, these senior-most managers embody the insight, dedication and professionalism to which we all aspire.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is a development at UN level that I would like to draw to your attention. In an effort to harmonize the conditions of service for United Nations staff serving in non-family duty stations, there is a proposal being considered that would significantly alter and in most cases – as a matter of fact almost all [cases] - reduce the support given to the staff of UNHCR and sister humanitarian agencies in non-family duty stations.

At any given time, one third of our international staff, for whom rotation is mandatory, are serving in hardship, non-family duty stations. And together with other field-based UN agencies, like WFP or Unicef, UNHCR has been using a Special Operations Approach to administering these positions, allowing structured support to be available to family members located in the most convenient place for the staff member.

I appreciate the importance of harmonization but equal treatment is only fair when it addresses equal situations. UNHCR staff members are expected to spend perhaps a third of their careers in non-family duty stations. That is very different from the normal patterns of deployment, for instance, in the UN Secretariat. Attracting the ablest personnel to deep field locations is already very difficult. We cannot risk discouraging staff from working in these complex and insecure duty stations by worsening their working conditions, and by imposing even greater distances between them and their families.

I appeal to states as members of the UN General Assembly to take this into account. Please do not bring us solutions to problems we do not have, aggravating the problems we do have.

I would like to pay tribute to UNHCR staff, to their courage and their spirit of sacrifice, working as they do in the harshest conditions in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNHCR's transition to a needs-based budget, the GNA, allows us more accurately to reflect the needs of the people we care for. I would like, however, to sound a note of caution. Having developed and implemented this important tool, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of funding it. To this end, we hope to secure additional resources from traditional donors but also significantly reinforcing our efforts to attract new donors, and setting ambitious targets for fundraising from the private sector. The generous and unprecedented donor support throughout my first mandate, that I want refer to here, sustains my optimism in this regard.

The GNA will only work as it is intended to do if donors resist the temptation to earmark contributions for activities outside established priorities. Only with the flexibility of contributions will we be able to direct funds to where they are most needed.

As we have reduced headquarters costs from 14 to 9.5 percent of total expenditure and staff costs from over 42 percent to under 29 percent, we can guarantee that a larger and larger share of unearmarked funding is being dedicated to forgotten crises, rather than structural costs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2010 and beyond, our priorities in the development of UNHCR capacity will focus on protection and emergency preparedness and response.

Protection staffing benchmarks were issued in March to guide offices on appropriate levels of personnel for protection functions in various operational contexts.

Through the Division of International Protection and the Global Learning Centre, we will enhance protection learning opportunities for both UNHCR personnel and partners. We are expanding the range of thematic protection learning programmes, including for responding to people displaced internally by conflict or natural disasters, and increasing external training opportunities.

With more refugees now living in cities than camps, we are also enhancing our efforts to reach out to these populations, building on innovative practices such as the cash assistance programmes in Syria and Jordan, delivered via the national ATM networks, and using text messages to notify refugees of aid distributions. We have chosen a number of pilot sites for the implementation of our new urban refugee policy, released last year, and will be conducting a series of real-time evaluations this fall.

At the heart of all these efforts is partnership – particularly with the national partners who account for about three quarters of all UNHCR’s implementing arrangements. Over the last 15 years, our national protection partnerships have doubled. An important effort will need to be developed in recruitment, in training, in the months and years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In emergency preparedness and response, our fundamental objective is to respond immediately to the needs of displaced populations by mobilizing emergency personnel and dispatching the first relief items within 72 hours. To do so, we already maintain stocks of shelter and relief items for up to 500,000 people, over and above the resources required for our ongoing programmes.

And the quick succession of crises this past summer in Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan, together with our contingency stockpiling for situations in the east and horn of Africa, underlined how important it has been for us to be able to respond to more than one emergency at the same time, as well as preserving sufficient financial capacity to begin operations without having to wait for an appeal.

The Emergency Response roster is being reinforced with senior level UNHCR personnel and skill sets from across the organization. And protection will be included as a core function, ensuring that that expertise is available not only in response to traditional refugee crises but to internal displacement caused either by conflict or natural disasters.

A comprehensive training strategy for security and emergency response is already being implemented.

And a Global Stock Management System and delivery plan of action have allowed us to consolidate and streamline the management of the Central Emergency stockpile and regional ones.

New and better tents, blankets and other relief items have been designed in cooperation with the ICRC and already entered the supply chain. The first have been recently deployed in Pakistan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNHCR is also developing a new set of partnerships with the corporate sector in order to define a strategy and promote a number of projects to make full use of technological innovations for refugee protection, for assistance and for the search for durable solutions. Presently, these efforts are focused on renewable energy and information technology and telecommunications, especially mobile systems and devices.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like in conclusion to return to the upcoming anniversaries of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the birth of Fridtjof Nansen.

We foresee a year of activities culminating in a Ministerial level meeting of States Parties to the Refugee and Statelessness Conventions in Geneva in December 2011. And there, we hope states will be able to pledge concrete actions to reinforce international protection, to provide durable solutions, and resolve refugee situations, and also we hope states will define forward-looking orientations to new challenges.

The commemorations will provide an opportunity to step up our efforts to promote accessions to the 1954 and 1961 statelessness conventions, and to finalize a range of advocacy, doctrinal and policy tools for combating statelessness.

The commemorations will also provide a valuable platform from which to promote increased public understanding and support for forcibly displaced and stateless people.

We hope through the commemorations to forge a new consensus on protection, extending beyond the scope of persons covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention. It is not our intention to revise that Convention. Rather, we want, together with you, to examine the protection gaps in the context of people on the move and see what could be new ways to think about – and to do – protection for them.

A preliminary set of briefings on the proposed commemoration activities has recently been conducted for states through the regional groupings here in Geneva. More information will be available at a side event tomorrow morning. And a series of Informal Consultations with Excom members will allow, I hope, for maximum consensus going forward.

Together with our partners in the non-governmental sector, who help make asylum, resettlement and repatriation possible, I believe we can make 2011 a very special year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Looking back after five years as High Commissioner, I am struck by how far your support and the dedication of UNHCR staff have allowed us to go. Inevitably, given the evolving nature of forced displacement, I acknowledge that we still have a long way to go.

On the 14th of December, UNHCR will turn 60. For an individual, it is not always easy to reconcile the wisdom of experience with the vitality of youth. For an organization, it can be exactly the same.

At 60, I hope we have achieved the wisdom expected of us. But I can assure you we have lost none of our vitality.

Thank you very much.