

**Statement by H.E. Tobias Billström,
Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy of Sweden
at the Ministerial-Level Intergovernmental Event of Member States of the
United Nations to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating
to the Status of Refugees and the 50th Anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction
of Statelessness (7-8 December 2011)**

07-12-11 PM

Mr. Chairperson, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very honored to speak at this truly historic event and I am indeed pleased to see that so many are present. It shows the importance of the two conventions that we commemorate during these days and it underscores that we all share the sense of responsibility for providing protection and assistance to the far too many people around the world who are still in need of it.

The world has witnessed dramatic changes since the Refugee Convention was signed 60 years ago. Many brutal wars and conflicts have come to an end, and I wish I could say that the need of the Convention had declined over the years. Unfortunately, we all know that new conflicts and violence still force people to leave their homelands to seek refuge from violence and persecution. The Refugee Convention is as relevant today as it was when it was signed 60 years ago in the aftermath of the Second World war, and it continues to be the cornerstone of the international protection regime.

Sweden was one of the first countries to ratify the Refugee Convention and has since had a strong commitment to the principles enshrined in it. In this spirit – and to mark this anniversary year – the Swedish Government has started the process of reviewing the remaining national reservations to the Refugee Convention, and I expect that we will be able to withdraw most of them in the near future. Sweden is also reviewing the national reservations to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons. I am also pleased to say that my Government will intensify its efforts to reduce statelessness at national as well as international level.

Providing protection to those in need of protection is a core principle of the Refugee Convention. Sweden will maintain a national asylum system that is humane, legally secure and effective, and there is also some room for improvement. Within the EU Sweden will continue to contribute so that the Common European Asylum Policy will uphold these principles. It is important to ensure that access to asylum procedures is guaranteed and that the individual assessments are conducted in an equal manner, regardless of which EU Member State's responsible for processing the asylum application. Moreover, Sweden will support the role of UNHCR within the EU cooperation.

Mr. Chair,

There are many of you here today representing countries that have witnessed large-scale influx of refugees to your countries. On behalf of the Swedish Government and the Swedish people, I want to extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude to you for the hospitality and solidarity you have shown your neighbors. We commend you for the tremendous work you have done and continue to carry out, and acknowledge and respect the difficulties you face in coping with these situations. It is important that we all combine our efforts to contribute to durable solutions for the refugee situations of today.

Resettlement is an important tool in order to contribute to solving protracted refugee situations and if used strategically, it can unlock other durable solutions, such as voluntary repatriation and local integration. Sweden is committed to continue providing resettlement in close cooperation with UNHCR and work together with other states in promoting increased opportunities for refugee resettlement, and also to encourage more countries to offer resettlement. Within the EU, Sweden will continue to work towards an increased overall number of resettlement places within the EU, on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Chair,

During these 60 years the UNHCR has carried out commendable work to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to people in need, including the important

efforts to provide protection and assistance to IDPs, often in the most remote and dangerous areas in the world. Humanitarian needs are increasing and getting more complex - therefore the work to improve the humanitarian system must continue. An efficient humanitarian response depends on a collective approach, and in this context UNHCR has a responsibility and plays a crucial role in improving the humanitarian system as a whole.

Sweden is proud of being a strong supporter of UNHCR and I would like to take this opportunity to extend our deepest gratitude and admiration to the dedicated staff of UNHCR for their tireless efforts to provide hope and dreams to millions of persons around the world. I also would like ensure that UNHCR can continue to count on the solid support from Sweden. For 2012, the Swedish Government have suggested a core contribution to the UNHCR which amounts to SEK 613 million. The decision is subject to Parliamentary approval on 20 December. In addition, Sweden will also contribute towards the bi-annual UNHCR Global Appeal, including geographical and regional support in order to give UNHCR predictable, rapid and flexible financing which promotes a long-term perspective and an operational flexibility in UNHCR operations.

Mr. Chair, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Convention on Reduction of Statelessness will continue to serve its purposes as long as there are people in need of protection. I wish the day would come when that would no longer be the case. But until that day, we must continue and increase our support for the two Conventions and join hands to find solutions for the world's refugees and stateless persons.

Thank you.