

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL EVENT AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL OF MEMBER
STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1951 CONVENTION RELATING TO THE STATUS OF
REFUGEES AND THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1961 CONVENTION ON THE
REDUCTION OF STATELESSNESS**

7-8 December 2011

AM

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

General Debate

Geneva, 7 December 2011

Check against delivery

Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States

Dear Mr. Chairperson,
Honored High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

07-12-11 AM

It is my great honor and privilege to take the floor today at this event on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

A little more than six decades ago, War World II and the Holocaust forced millions of civilians across national frontiers. The plight of those lucky enough to survive these displacements and were looking for a safe home added to many challenges Europe was facing at the time. Europe was also determined to ensure that the displacement and trauma caused by the persecution and destruction of the war years would not be repeated. This commitment inspired the creation of the Refugee Agency and the drafting of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Two milestones for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers whose fate was to endure throughout the years, as the Convention proved its resilience and the UNHCR's mission never ended.

A Nobel Peace Prize for UNHCR in the years following the War materialized the worldwide appreciation for the Refugee Agency, who, in the words of the awarding Committee, undertook the formidable task of "*protector of the refugees, acting as a vigilant conscience to some governments, forging cooperation among all others working for the cause of the refugees*". Decades after this impressive accomplishment, and another Nobel Peace Prize in 1981, the respect and appreciation for the work of UNHCR remained intact. In this anniversary context, the EU and its Member States commend the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres, and the staff of UNHCR for their everyday efforts and dedicated work in protecting and assisting refugees.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union and its Member States have a long history of concern for the fate of refugees, as millions of our citizens are decedents of refugee grandparents. The territory of the European Union is today a safe haven for those forced to flee violence, persecution and discrimination. We are proud of our hospitality and we will continue to consolidate the international refugee protection regime in full compliance with the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and in accordance with the values of dignity, equality and respect on which the EU is founded. In this regard, we are advancing with the development of a common migration policy and towards the establishment of the Common European Asylum System by 2012. The objective of our common asylum policy is an ethical legal framework, based on humanitarian values, fair procedures and solidarity, offering international protection in compliance with the principle of *non-refoulement*, with the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and other relevant treaties.

The European Union underlines the progress it has achieved in this respect in the last ten years: the completion of the first phase of the creation of a Common European Asylum System, the establishment of the European Refugee Fund and of the European Asylum Support Office, enhanced practical cooperation, reinforcement of the rule of law guided by the case-law of European courts competent in the area of asylum. The European Union reiterates its commitment to further developing the Common European Asylum System based on high protection standards combined with fair and effective procedures.

Mr. Chairperson,

Statelessness affects several million people around the world, among whom the most vulnerable are children. The consequences of lack of nationality are numerous and severe. Many stateless persons live in extreme poverty and are denied basic rights and services such as access to education and health care. The lack of identity

documentation limits their freedom of movement. They are subject to arbitrary deportations and prolonged detentions, are vulnerable to social exclusion, trafficking and exploitation. Nationality is a universal right and it should get the urgent attention it deserves.

We are committed to support UNHCR efforts and to prevent and end statelessness in compliance with the principles of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Mr. Chairperson,

Asylum countries in many parts of the world are concerned about the protracted nature of refugee problems, urban refugee issues and illegal migration, an imbalance in burden- and responsibility-sharing, and increasing costs of hosting refugees and asylum-seekers. New crises are adding to the load. The current year has been extraordinary in terms of involvement of humanitarian and migration organizations in emergencies and post-crisis management all over the world. Countries of the EU Southern Neighborhood have faced the wave of democratic uprisings that spread across the Arab world in 2011. Crises unfolded in Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan and the Horn of Africa. These events displaced thousands in need of protection and assistance.

The EU and its Member States were quick to react and mobilize funds and assistance, complementing many efforts by national authorities. But we can only be as fast as our implementing partners on the ground. A timely and effective response to these crises depended entirely on an effective emergency response mechanism, promptness in terms of access and rapid deployment and effective coordination among humanitarian actors in the field. UNHCR's response to these changing environments was efficient and timely. We strongly support UNHCR's continuous work to strengthen its emergency preparedness. Also, let us use this opportunity to welcome UNHCR's commitment to the further strengthening of the collective humanitarian system through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. These partner agencies and organizations are certainly in the room, sharing this anniversary

moment with the UNHCR. We want to ensure them all of our support and we look forward to a successful outcome of this collective endeavor.

Mr. Chairman,

In October this year the Council of the European Union adopted the European Union Declaration on the 60th Anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, in which European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to assist and protect, in accordance with international obligations, all those men, women and children, who are compelled against their will to leave their homes and their countries in order to escape fear of persecution. A copy of this Declaration is available in the back of the room.

UNHCR has consistently been one of our major partners. Our strong and continuous support to UNHCR for field operations is demonstrated by the fact that EU and its Member States are the second biggest contributor to UNHCR's funding.

Thank you.