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Assistant Secretary
David Robinson

**U.S. Government Plenary Statement
UNHCR Commemorations Ministerial
December 7, 2011
Geneva, Switzerland**

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delivery*

PM

Mr. Chairman,

It is a pleasure to be here with you to mark the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 50th anniversary of the Statelessness Convention. These two conventions not only have been the foundation for the very important work that UNHCR undertakes, they have provided the framework for the international community in its efforts to protect refugees and stateless persons. I want to commend UNHCR's more than 60 years of service protecting the world's most vulnerable populations and salute UNHCR's staff for their tireless efforts often made in very difficult and dangerous environments.

The pledges we make today are a symbol of our strong commitment to international protection. The U.S. Government took the High Commissioner's request for actionable and concrete pledges very seriously. We devoted a great deal of time and care and employed a whole of government approach to develop a comprehensive set of pledges designed to ensure greater protection for refugees, stateless persons and other persons of concern. We acknowledge the helpful

recommendations from UNHCR and the U.S. NGO community, with which we consulted during the process. Given time limitations, I cannot mention all of our pledges; therefore, I will highlight only a few in my remarks.

Our pledges address five themes ranging from asylum and detention, to vulnerable populations, to refugee resettlement and statelessness. On detention, the U.S. Government pledges to work with UNHCR and other stakeholders on improved release practices, including reviewing and amending, as necessary, current policies to better ensure that individuals in immigration detention, including asylum seekers, are released from detention in a safe and responsible manner. Regarding the national security exclusion grounds which may affect certain asylum seekers, the U.S. Government pledges to reduce significantly the number of cases on hold through the issuance of additional exemptions between now and the end of 2012.

Women and children are two groups who have unique protection needs and vulnerabilities that are amplified when they are forcibly displaced. The U.S. Government pledges to focus our diplomatic efforts on preventing and resolving statelessness among women and children, including efforts to raise global awareness about discrimination against women in nationality laws and to mobilize governments to repeal such laws. We are working with UNHCR to prevent

refugee and IDP children from becoming victims of and participants in conflict, and providing rehabilitation for those who have been recruited or detained, by promoting education and psychosocial programming, expanding the prevention of and response to gender based violence in all its forms. We continue to focus our efforts with UNHCR and child advocates on the protection of unaccompanied children, many of whom are vulnerable and require protection. And we pledge to assist UNHCR with the deployment of eight trained staff to assist in efforts to conduct more systematized Best Interest Determinations. The importance of enhanced protection for women and children cannot be overstated.

Turning to refugee resettlement, the U.S. Government remains a strong partner, welcoming more than 56,000 refugees from 69 countries this past year alone. We pledge to enhance the delivery of comprehensive durable solutions, notably in protracted refugee situations, by working with governments, UNHCR and other partners to promote increased opportunities for refugee resettlement, the participation of new resettlement countries, improved integration outcomes for resettled refugees, and the strategic use of resettlement to unlock the other durable solutions of voluntary repatriation and local integration. In this regard, my government pledges to undertake a multi-year twinning program with the governments of Uruguay and Bulgaria to strengthen global resettlement capacity.

While formidable, these pledges are only a snapshot of what can be accomplished through sustained effort and political will. A copy of the full set of my government's pledges has been made available to UNHCR and is on the U.S. Department of State's website.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the United States remains a committed partner of UNHCR. As we stated at the Executive Committee meeting in October, we must be relentless, formidable, and effective advocates for victims of persecution, violence, and human rights abuses. We must be emboldened by a very broad conception of our humanitarian and protection responsibilities. The conventions have and continue to serve as a roadmap for the principles to which we must remain faithful. It is through the full implementation of our collective pledges this week that we will reap true benefits, and, as responsible governments, enable UNHCR to better serve its beneficiaries for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.