

**STATEMENT
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AT

**MINISTERIAL MEETING
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, Geneva AM

Honorable High Commissioner,
Distinguished President,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is truly a year of triple jubilee celebrations for the people gathered in this Assembly Hall and beyond. 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 150th Anniversary of the first High Commissioner for Refugees Fridtjof Nansen. These are important reminders of historic commitments undertaken by States and the international community as a whole and I would like to congratulate the UNHCR, the High Commissioner, as well as all of us with these anniversaries.

Canadian philosopher Howard Adelman called the 20th century the “century of refugees”. Unfortunately, this description can also relate to the 21st century as of yet. It once again convinces us that today the questions of protection of rights and well-being of refugees as well as responsibility for addressing their needs and concerns still remain as important as before.

Mr. President,

The name of Nansen is of special significance for Armenians. After the Armenian Genocide of 1915, when the very physical survival of Armenians was under question, the League of Nations and Fridtjof Nansen personally, did their utmost to reduce human sufferings of hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees seeking asylum in different countries around the world. With the aim of resettlement of Armenian refugees Nansen visited Armenia in 1925.

One of the highlights of Fridtjof Nansen’s anniversary celebrations in Armenia was the opening of the monument to the great humanist in the center of Yerevan that was attended by Nansen’s granddaughter and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Being a State Party to both Conventions – the most fundamental instruments regulating the treatment of refugees, Armenia has first-hand knowledge about this phenomenon, and unfortunately, the problem of refugees has not become a mere part of history for Armenia.

Mr. President, listening to the statement of Azerbaijan yesterday, I had to insert a new paragraph in my statement. I have to remind the representative of Azerbaijan that it was his country that started the war against the people of Nagorno Karabakh, it was his country that forced hundreds of thousands people to become refugee both in Armenia and in Azerbaijan, and that his country must stop the continuing policy of ethnic hatred and intolerance. As a result of war, aggression and ethnic cleansing the Armenian population has left Azerbaijan, and since 1988, Armenia has sheltered over 400.000 refugees from Azerbaijan.

Mr. President,

From the first days of arrival of refugees in Armenia, the Government's policy was voluntary and full integration of refugees by providing them accommodation, schooling to the children, full access to healthcare and social benefits. The UNHCR considers this as "one of the most successful voluntary naturalizations of refugees...". I have to commend for this joint work carried out by the UNHCR and its Yerevan office and the international donors.

Irrespective of dire economic conditions, Armenia spared no effort to provide refugees with equal opportunities with the citizens of Armenia. Yet, the issue of housing still remains the most acute problem for refugees. In order to solve this problem and to raise the required financing, the Armenian Government organized an International Donors' Conference held last May in Yerevan.

The Conference was attended by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. Antonio Guterres who called it "timely and significant in seeking to generate support for a solution to a situation of displacement...". The High Commissioner also expressed hope "to see these families included in the national development programs of the Government, international development agencies and financial institutions". I can say today, Mr. High Commissioner, that these refugees and their urgent needs are included in the plans of my Government, but, alas, that alone won't be enough.

Armenia once again became a safe haven for refugees recently. Thousands of Armenians from Iraq found refuge in Armenia in 2004 and are gradually building their new lives in their new home-country. The Armenian Government has allocated resources from its budget to alleviate the condition of the Iraqi refugees.

Mr. President,

We highly appreciate the work of the UNHCR and its effective involvement at global level in conformity with the principles of impartiality and neutrality. Today the outreach of UNHCR to protect and address urgent needs of refugees tends to be overarching, yet not as universal as it should be. The fact that the status of certain territories is not yet officially recognized, should not preclude international community and in particular the UNHCR from performing their duties towards protecting and promoting affected populations in those very regions. Armenia has been advocating

involvement of UN human rights and humanitarian machinery in tackling refugee issues in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. President,

The refugee-related pledges cannot be just words for Armenia.

- Armenia wants to solve the protracted situation with those refugees who are confident that they will never return to Azerbaijan. However, there will remain a group of refugees who want to return to their ancestral homeland occupied by Azerbaijan.
- The newly adopted law on refugees and asylum guarantees equal rights, including economic and social rights, to the refugees *inter alia* in education, employment, social security, property, etc.
- The national laws guarantee birth registration, including for refugees and stateless persons.
- These laws include safeguards against statelessness and guarantee non-discriminatory provisions in order not to cause statelessness among women and/or their children.
- The recent population census carried out in Armenia was intended also for identification of refugee and/or stateless populations.
- The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia and the relevant legislation guarantees against any kind of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

I thank you Mr. President