



CROATIA

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**Address by State Secretary for Political Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
Republic of Croatia
Mario Nobile, PhD**

**Ministerial event 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**

Geneva, 8 December 2011.

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address you on this solemn occasion when we are jointly commemorating 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.

This is an opportunity for all of us to reconfirm the core legal standards, principles and values, contained in the fundamental legal instruments which form the basis of the international protection of refugees and stateless persons. In this vein, we remain confident that our exchange of views on this occasion will represent a reconfirmed commitment of the whole United Nations membership for the way ahead, and in facing the new challenges, inspired by the Ministerial Communiqué which we will adopt at the end of this Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

The accession to the key international treaties related to statelessness, such as 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, is of crucial importance for obtaining adequate responses from all national and international actors in the reduction of statelessness.

As a pledge on behalf of the Government of Croatia, I am particularly pleased to inform you on Croatia's recent accession to the 1961 Convention. The accession confirms our commitment to prevent possible cases of statelessness as well as our determination to join concerted national and international efforts in this framework.

With this purpose, Croatia co-hosted, alongside with UNHCR and other international partners the Regional Conference on the Provision of Civil Documentation and Registration in South Eastern Europe, in Zagreb in October 2011. Zagreb Declaration, adopted at that occasion, envisages the concerted efforts at local and regional levels to facilitate access to civil registration and documentation with the final aim to gradually reduce number of stateless persons. Particular attention in this process will be given to the most vulnerable groups such as Roma minorities.

Mr. Chairman,

Croatia welcomes the outcome of the Ministerial conference on solving the refugee situation in the region which took place in Belgrade on 7 November 2011. Four countries of the region - Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia - signed the Joint Declaration, in which they reviewed the successfully resolved outstanding issues. They also endorsed a Joint Regional Programme for finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons that represents an agreed regional instrument for the final resolution of the refugee issue in our region.

At the same time, the countries recommitted themselves to continue efforts at the national levels with a view to resolve their particular refugee situations. Croatia in this respect pledges today to resolutely continue the implementation of the national return programmes.

Let me point out several lessons learned from the process.

First of all, we have set a new standard in regional cooperation on refugee issues by applying pragmatic, individual, humanitarian and depoliticized approach in assuring durable solutions. This is the success of both, national governments and the international partners that may be a model for other regions as well.

In accordance with the UNHCR's approach, the focus was on those still in need – people in collective centers and those socially disadvantaged.

Best results have been achieved in interaction between national efforts and international partners in tackling a wide range of challenges: return or integration, exchange of data, access to civil documentation and other civil status issues, capacity building and international solidarity.

The solution of the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees cannot be viewed solely from national perspectives as they remain linked to the regional aspect.

This is why we are looking forward to a continued cooperation with the countries of the region and international partners in the implementation of the Regional Programme, in particular in the context of the preparations for the Donor Conference, to be held in Sarajevo in late April 2012.

Thank you!