



**SOUTH AFRICAN PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND  
OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

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**STATEMENT BY MS FATIMA CHOHAN, DEPUTY MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR  
REFUGEES (UNHCR) COMMEMORATIVE EVENT**

**Geneva, Switzerland  
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COUNTRY STATEMENT BY MS FATIMA CHOCHAN, DEPUTY MINISTER OF HOME,  
AFFAIRS ON THE OCCASSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION  
FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) COMMEMORATIVE EVENT

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

7-8 DECEMBER 2011

Chairperson,  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Antonio Guterres,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you today on behalf of the Government of South Africa during this commemorative event, marking the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Chairperson,

The Government of the Republic of South Africa pledges to remain unwavering and steadfast in its commitment to the protection of refugees. In this regard, the Government is taking four major steps to ensure that the security and other needs of refugees are met more effectively.

The first step relates to the reception of asylum seekers. South Africa attracts as many asylum seekers as all the countries of the European Union combined. A large number

of those applying for asylum are economic migrants, which impacts negatively on the processing of persons who have a well-founded fear of persecution as defined in the Convention. We are exploring ways of dealing with this unprecedented demand for asylum within the context of regional cooperation and domestic legislation.

The second step is to enhance the efficiency of adjudicating the status of those who seek asylum. This involves a number of initiatives, including the amending of legislation and improving structures and processes. An important part of this process will be strengthening regional cooperation and the partnership between the South African Government and the UNHCR.

The third step relates to the treatment and integration of refugees. The aim is to strengthen the security and welfare of persons, and especially vulnerable groups, that are accorded refugee status. We will achieve this by ensuring cooperation between spheres of government, between government departments; and between government, the UNHCR and civil society stakeholders. The approach is to work closely with local community structures and forums; and with structures established by refugees themselves. The principle is to build relationships that can benefit all parties until a durable solution to the situation of the refugees is found.

A fourth critical step is for South Africa to build bilateral and multilateral cooperation on asylum seeker and refugee matters with other states and regional and international bodies. Areas of common interest that are being considered include burden-sharing, the sharing of data, systems integration and capacity development. Such cooperation is in keeping with the spirit of the African Group Statement.

We will now address the issue of statelessness. The Government of South Africa declares its support for the principles and spirit of the 1954 Convention on the Status of Statelessness and the subsequent 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. These principles find expression in the South African Constitution and law.

The Government of South Africa pledges to become a signatory and party to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Statelessness and the subsequent 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness following the completion of an internal consultative process. The Government is committed to contributing to a world where no peoples are left stateless through the redefinition of political borders or non-registration of children at birth or indeed the repudiation or non-recognition of citizenship of groups of peoples. An important element in this regard is clarifying the respective roles and responsibilities of the South African government and relevant international organisations, including the UNHCR.

Statelessness is a global challenge and South Africa will renew its efforts to work regionally and internationally towards the important goal of the prevention and reduction of statelessness. An important mechanism which will prevent statelessness is the incorporation of National Population Registers in countries where these do not exist or are incomplete. In this regard, South Africa will next year be hosting the Second Conference for Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics for 2012, under the theme: "Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistic Institutional and Human Infrastructure."

In concluding, the South African government would like to note its appreciation of the work of the UNHCR. The importance of protecting refugees and reducing statelessness goes beyond seeking collective responses to human rights challenges. These are conscious and important steps towards realising a more caring world, which is at peace with itself.

I thank you.