

Revision

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At the Intergovernmental event at the ministerial-level of Member States of the United Nations to commemorate 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 PM

Mr. Chair,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,

It is my great honor and pleasure to take part in today's event, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Taking this opportunity, my delegation extends its gratitude to the High Commissioner, Mr. Antonio Guterres, UNHCR staff and all who have been devoting their efforts for the sake of refugees and stateless persons.

Looking back on the 60 years of the Refugee Convention, we are proud to notice the accomplishments, yet remain humble for the numerous challenges ahead that we must face. One of the most notable achievements is the wide recognition of the principle of non-refoulement under the Convention as a norm of Customary International Law. With the commitment of the international community, asylum-seekers and refugees are safer and have a better chance of enjoying the basic rights to life, freedom from torture and liberty.

However, as clearly pointed out in the High Commissioner's report to the General Assembly, we have not yet fully prevented the forceful return of people to countries where their lives are in danger, especially North Korean refugees in the neighboring countries. They remain under the constant threat of being repatriated to North Korea where they will surely be persecuted by the authorities. We need to stay more alert and encourage state parties and other countries to respect the letters and spirit of the principle of non-refoulement.

As a state party to the Refugee Convention and Protocol since 1992, the ROK Government has continuously strengthened its efforts to provide a better legal and administrative system for refugees. The Immigration Act offers legal framework for refugee protection and relevant administrative institutions and policies supplement the protection system. The revision of the Act in 2009 stipulated the "permission

to stay on humanitarian grounds,” institutionalizing protection and relevant assistance for migrants who do not fall in the category of refugee status under the Convention, but require humanitarian support. Some of the more recent improvements include the construction of the Refugee Reception Center, issuance of Machine-readable Travel Documents and support for refugee children in day-care facilities and pre-school education.

In this vein, the ROK Government reaffirms its commitment to providing necessary protection to refugees and asylum-seekers and upholding its obligations set forth under the Refugee Convention and the Protocol and pledges as follows.

First, in terms of legal improvement, the Government pledges to work with relevant actors towards the adoption of legislation that promotes the rights and protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Second, in terms of assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, the Government pledges to address language barriers and ensure fair assessment of their cases. The Government also pledges to provide basic subsistence support to asylum-seekers and assist in the integration of refugees into the Korean society. The Government is committed to provide necessary education, health, and social welfare services for them as well.

Third, in terms of institutional improvement, the Government pledges to improve on governmental institutions responsible for refugee status determination and asylum policy, and to strengthen professional training for the government officials in this area.

Mr. Chair,

Today we face ever-growing and new-arising challenges that require collective wisdom and action of the international community. In particular, I take note of the remarks of the High Commissioner Mr. Guterres this morning, with regard to the new challenge of protection gaps arising from the non-traditional causes of refugees such as climate change and food insecurity. A growing number of North Korean refugees fleeing to the neighboring countries may belong to this category of non-traditional causes. Commemorating the anniversaries of the Conventions, we must take this opportunity to invite states to continue their support for addressing the new issue concerning protection gaps and work together for the better protection of refugees and stateless persons. On its part, the ROK Government reaffirms its strong commitment to protecting those who have been forcibly displaced and to working closely with UNHCR to this end.