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PM

TURKEY

Mr Chairman,
Mr High Commissioner,
Distinguished Participants,

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address this historical meeting. Allow me to commend the efforts of the UNHCR in convening this meeting.

In line with its historical tradition, the Republic of Turkey is a country that has always welcomed and helped people without discrimination, who flee from oppression and persecution, and enabled them to stay in its territory.

Turkey while taking the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees as the key instruments for addressing asylum issues; considers human dimension of asylum and takes a broadening approach in practice.

By not returning asylum-seekers to a place where they fear persecution, Turkey thoroughly respects the principle of "*non-refoulement*" in conformity with the 1951 Convention and international law. Within this context, even when an asylum-seeker does not fulfil the criteria set out in the Convention to be recognized as a refugee, the person is granted "subsidiary protection" and allowed to stay in Turkey if there is the threat of human rights violations or persecution when returned.

Mr Chairmen,

Due to its geographical location and owing to ongoing conflicts, civil wars and instability in the neighbouring region Turkey has experienced unexpected migration influxes during the last two decades. Our country welcomed over a million people in that period mainly from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, and allocated substantial resources to meet their urgent and basic needs and accommodation.

A recent example to that is the "Temporary Protection" extended to the thousands of Syrian nationals currently in Turkey who were obliged to leave their country as a result of the unfortunate events in Syria.

As the world witnessed closely Turkey has followed an "open door" policy from the start of the events and accepted the fleeing groups to its territory. Our Government has announced "*non-refoulement*" in the highest level as the first and foremost step to provide their security. To date a secure environment is being provided to the near 9 thousand Syrian nationals and approximately over 11 thousand voluntarily returned home.

Mr Chairman,

Turkey, while reviewing its legislation on migration and asylum in line with the realities of the era has completed drafting of a comprehensive new law, in consideration of the international law principles and jurisprudence will form the basis of our national policy regarding migration and asylum.

I would like to mention that the drafting process of this law has been as exemplary as its content. The draft has been prepared through a transparent and inclusive process where intensive consultations took place.

Taking this occasion, I would like to mention our appreciation of the UNHCR Ankara Office for their valuable contribution and support to the drafting process of this law. We would like to see this draft which is the product of collective wisdom to be adopted in 2012.

Our plans for the future are not limited with this law and I would like to mention another important development: Two draft laws paving the way for Turkey's accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons have been approved by the relevant Commissions of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

I would like to underline that Turkey has decided to accede to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and

Mr Chairmen,

Unfortunately, we are facing increasing humanitarian problems as a result of numerous crises. UNHCR despite its limited resources is fulfilling a very important task in assisting refugees all around the world as well as finding solutions to refugee problems.

We are grateful to High Commissioner Antonio Guterres, for his valuable efforts in seeking solutions to these serious problems also having political and humanitarian dimensions. We are witnessing with admiration his ability and common sense.

His historical visit to Turkey last year helped both better understanding of the problems faced by Turkey in the area of asylum and to emphasising UNHCR's important role in finding solutions to these problems as well as strengthening the existing cooperation and solidarity with the UNHCR.

Mr Chairmen,

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to continue the close, fruitful and satisfactory cooperation with the UNHCR in matters related to asylum.

Thank you Mr Chairmen.
