



## Australian Government

### Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

#### UNHCR MINISTERIAL MEETING

#### AUSTRALIAN STATEMENT

07-12-11 AM

Mr Chairman, I am honoured to be here to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and the 50th anniversary of the *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*.

Australia has been with UNHCR from the very beginning. We were the sixth country to ratify the Refugee Convention and a founding member of the Executive Committee.

Since that time, millions of refugees have been assisted by UNHCR and the international community. In particular, I pay tribute to the dedication of UNHCR staff who confront and work in some of the world's harshest conditions, and who often make enormous sacrifices for their commitment to helping people in desperate need.

Mr Chairman, the Refugee Convention is the cornerstone of the international protection system. Over 60 years, it has demonstrated its flexibility and relevance amid ever changing global circumstances. Ingrained at its core are human dignity, international solidarity and the imperative to protect individuals from persecution. These are embodied in the principle of *non-refoulement*, and are as relevant today as they were in 1951.

Unfortunately, the challenges of displacement continue to confront us and their form is constantly changing. We face crises of increasing number and complexity.

International movement has become easier, resulting in greater numbers of people travelling and greater mixed migration flows, but remains dangerous in many instances.

Twice in the last 12 months, Australia has seen significant tragedies, as people claiming asylum have sought to make the dangerous boat journey to Australia. We will continue to work with UNHCR and other states in our region to achieve durable solutions to dissuade these dangerous journeys.

While recommitting to the principles of refugee protection, we must also work together to find innovative solutions to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in order to be able to ensure we can provide protection to those in greatest need.

Mr Chairman, Australia is willing to do its part and we pledge the following commitments to improve the lives of refugees and stateless people:

**We pledge to implement legislation to grant complementary forms of protection to persons who are outside the scope of refugee protection instruments.**

In recent months, we have passed legislation through the Parliament to make this possible and we are working to ensure it will come into effect in the first quarter of 2012.

This reflects Australia's commitment to international human rights and protecting people who face a real risk of significant harm.

**We pledge to better identify stateless persons and assess their claims.**

Australia is committed to minimising the incidence of statelessness and to ensuring that stateless persons are treated no less favourably than people with an identified nationality. Australia will continue to work with UNHCR, civil society and interested parties to progress this pledge.

In the spirit of international cooperation and burden sharing, **we pledge to enhance the delivery of comprehensive durable solutions, particularly for protracted refugee situations. Through our work with UNHCR, other resettlement States and partners we pledge to promote increased opportunities for refugee resettlement and the participation of new resettlement countries. We also pledge to focus on improved integration outcomes for resettled refugees and the strategic use of resettlement to unlock the other durable solutions of voluntary repatriation and local integration.**

To help realise this, **we pledge to enter into twinning partnerships with emerging resettlement countries to enhance and consolidate their capacity.**

**We also pledge to continue to prioritise the protection of women and girls. We will work with UNHCR to ensure adequate resources are allocated to delivering on UNHCR's updated sexual and gender-based violence strategy, and the recommendations contained in the report from the regional dialogues with refugee women and girls. Recognising the root causes of gender-based violence, we pledge to promote the empowerment of women and girls to enhance their protection. In particular, Australia's newly appointed Global Ambassador for Women and Girls will engage with UNHCR and refugee groups on these issues.**

**We pledge to enhance regional cooperation and burden-sharing on refugee protection and international migration in the Asia-Pacific by working with our partners in the Bali Process to operationalise the Regional Cooperation Framework including by working closely with our Bali Process Co-Chair towards the establishment of a Regional Support Office.**

**Australia also pledges to continue our long-standing support for UNHCR's mandate and operations through the provision of core and unearmarked funding. We recognise that humanitarian funding that is both predictable and flexible best enables UNHCR to plan, prioritise and program critical protection work. We also recognise that humanitarian funding alone will not resolve protracted refugee situations, and pledge to continue our efforts to support durable solutions for refugees through enhanced linkages between humanitarian assistance, early recovery and development programming.**

Mr Chairman, in closing, while 2011 has been an extremely challenging year and the picture often looks bleak, we must not forget the positives. Here with me here today are resettlement success stories Ameer from Fairfield High School in Sydney and his brother Ghaith.

Ameer has excelled in the short years he has been at the school, under the guidance of Principal Robert Mulas, who is also here with me today as part of the Australian delegation.

Mr Mulas is the face of the open-hearted resettlement work that is done in Australia – every day, all around the country, individual by individual – out of the limelight, and expecting no recognition or reward.

He has made his school the focal point of community integration work, engaging refugee parents and the school's extended refugee community with remarkable success.

Ameer and Ghaith are but two of over 750,000 people who have been offered a haven from persecution in Australia since 1945. While those who have found refuge in Australia have benefited from a new and safe life, Australia has unquestionably also benefited from the social, economic and cultural contribution of refugees like Ameer and Ghaith over those decades and will continue to do so.

Having faced the darkest acts of humanity, refugees hold the finest of human ambitions, a resilient spirit and a desire to succeed. As an international community, we must not let them down.

Lasting solutions can be achieved. Australia has always offered – and will continue to offer – our political and financial support. We will do our part to share responsibility through regional and international institutions and arrangements.

Through building on the achievements of the past, we can meet the challenges of the future.

Thank you.