

UNHCR Ministerial Event

7-8 December 2011

PM

Statement by Under-Secretary of State Mrs Anne Sipiläinen,  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Chairperson,  
High Commissioner,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking UNHCR for organizing this event that marks the 60th and 50th anniversary of the two important and unique international conventions. Finland highly appreciates work done by UNHCR in assisting and protecting as well advocating for protection of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless people.

I would like to briefly comment on three issues: the Conventions, resettlement and integration, and protection.

First, the Conventions.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are cornerstones of the international refugee protection regime. It has provided essential guidance for both national and international actors throughout its existence. I take the opportunity to reaffirm the support of the Government of Finland to UNHCR in monitoring the implementation of the Convention. The Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness plays an important role for improving the situation of an estimated twelve million stateless people worldwide. Finland acceded to the Convention in 2009.

Finland's asylum policy is based on full respect and implementation of our obligations under the Refugee Convention. We maintain two reservations to the Convention, neither of which has been of significance for the legal status of refugees. At this occasion, Finland **pledges** that it will launch a review process in 2012 on whether these two reservations can be considered outdated and consequently lifted.

Secondly, resettlement and integration.

Resettlement of vulnerable refugees is an important form of cooperation between Finland and UNHCR. Finland has been a partner to UNHCR on resettlement since 1979, and will continue to do so.

We believe that successful integration of refugees can only happen at the local level and when carried out in cooperation with municipalities and local communities. Finland **pledges** to carry out dialogue with the municipalities in order to improve and speed up the community placement process.

We are satisfied to note that the number of countries participating in resettlement has increased. Finland continues to be willing to share experiences with new resettlement countries. We also associate ourselves with the European Union declaration and are committed to the development of a Common European Asylum System and to the strengthening of practical cooperation in the form of the European Asylum Support Office.

To commemorate the anniversary of the Conventions, UNHCR has arranged regional dialogues in various parts of the world to make the voices of refugee women and children heard. Finland was proud to host the European Dialogue, which was arranged in Helsinki in May. The Dialogue involved about thirty refugee women originating from various countries.

Thirdly, the future challenges of protection.

The UN Refugee Convention has stood the test of time remarkably well, both as a key norm and as a motivator for joint efforts to provide protection for the most vulnerable. Nevertheless, we have to improve the implementation of the Convention.

Refugee law continues to evolve. The status of women as refugees and applicants of protection, human rights violations related to gender and sexual orientation, environmental and other disasters are areas of international protection where we have to be prepared to improve the right to protection. We commend the efforts made by UNHCR to strengthen protection of and assistance to a growing number of internally displaced persons who fall outside the mandate of the Convention.

We as the international community – governments, leaders, **parliamentarians**, civil society – have to be ready to take steps to ensure adequate protection also in the future, in a rapidly changing and challenging environment.

For Finland, UNHCR is the largest recipient of humanitarian assistance: 20.2 million euro in 2011. Finland encourages States to provide UNHCR with unearmarked and flexible funding in order to ensure that the needs of various recipient groups can be met, and that UNHCR can best operate in the constantly changing reality affecting the displaced.

Thank you.