

**The Statelessness Round Table in Central Asia  
(Almaty, 3-4 October 2013)**

**Opening Remarks by UNHCR**

Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen

I would like to warmly welcome you all today for the Central Asia Statelessness Round Table and regret very much my absence as I had to attend the high level meeting on Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI) that takes place at this moment in Ashgabat.

UNHCR values this opportunity of another constructive dialogue in this wonderful region to address the problem of Statelessness. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which forms the foundation of democracy and respect for dignity of man-kind stipulates solemnly in its article 15 that everyone has the right to a nationality and cannot be arbitrarily deprived of his right.

As you are aware the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been entrusted by the UN General Assembly with a global mandate to work closely with governments to provide protection to stateless persons worldwide and to prevent and reduce statelessness.<sup>1</sup>

State borders are paths that play a very important role in development, by which goods, services and workforce transit to bring prosperity and cultural diversity. This is well known in this region where the Silk Road was the vehicle of trade, cultural exchange and peaceful co-existence of people for hundreds of years. However, the upsurge of new borders can result in stateless populations as the breakup of the Soviet Union left thousands of people with undefined citizenship. In this sense, UNHCR recognizes that the Countries in the Region are making remarkable efforts not only to strengthen the

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly Resolutions A/RES49/169, 23 December 1994 and A/RES/50/152, 21 December 1995. In a series of Conclusions, most importantly Conclusion No. 106 in 2006, UNHCR's Executive Committee has provided guidance on how to implement this statelessness mandate. These require UNHCR to work with governments to address the issue, in particular by providing technical advice with regard to relevant legislation and practices and by offering operational support to promote the enjoyment of rights by stateless persons.

foundations of their young countries based on principles of human rights and democracy for all, but also to tackle the challenges of the new borders. Today, statelessness is a serious challenge for prosperity, development and national security of states.

In order to prevent and reduce statelessness, UNHCR works closely with governments to search all possible means. Regional conferences and round tables on citizenship and statelessness are the most appropriate mechanisms to exchange views, learn about good practices and strategize jointly how to cooperate and coordinate on such a crucial fact. Today's Round Table follows two previous and successful such events in Central Asia, Dushanbe in April 2007 and Ashgabat in December 2009. During these events, the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan agreed to take steps to examine their nationality laws and administrative practices for further actions in the area of prevention and reduction of statelessness in Central Asia. Since the Ashgabat Roundtable, a number of positive developments have occurred across the region. One of the best practices is the accession by the Government of Turkmenistan to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The registration of undocumented persons, conducted by the Turkmen Government led to the recognition of the nationality of thousands of people. In 2012, the Kazakhstan Human Rights Commission under the President of the Republic presented its Special Report on the Situation with the Rights of Oralmans, Stateless Persons, and Refugees with strong suggestions addressed to the Government. One of the recommendations of the Report concerns the necessity to amend national legislation on nationality. The Commission also recommended that the Government conduct a nationwide campaign to identify stateless persons, including persons with undetermined nationality. I am extremely pleased to notice that the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan takes now concrete steps to do so. Another best practice was the identification exercise of stateless persons conducted in Kyrgyzstan that took place in 2012. The Kyrgyz Republic established a special procedure to determinate citizenship which already benefited thousands of former stateless persons. Similar initiatives are also being planned in Tajikistan.

We celebrate the progress made because statelessness can impair the capacities of people to move freely, find jobs, access medical care or receive education, and it's a major human rights issue.

Dear Delegates,

We are convinced that the challenges related to statelessness in this region can be properly addressed by the initiatives that are being planned to take place. Therefore, I encourage you to continue the constructive dialogue, exchange good practice and do not be afraid of moving towards effective prevention and documentation of stateless persons in Central Asia by agreeing on concrete actions in your respective countries. I also encourage you to openly discuss how you can best coordinate your efforts in order to ensure that statelessness is eradicated in this region of the world and your countries proudly restore dignity of those who for long did not see the end of deprivation tunnel.

Allow me to thank you once again for your presence and wish you full success in this very important event.

Thank you very much for your attention.