

Agenda Item 3a (ii)

Madame Chair
Distinguished Delegates

The Committee has been provided with an overview of strategic priorities in the Americas. Therefore, let me use this opportunity to share major highlights in relation to achievements but also identification of gaps in the recent past. Such key developments will feed into the implementation of our strategy this year, and beyond.

Firstly, the highlights are set in the context of the Americas' contribution to the UNHCR's Global Strategic Priorities. In the Americas, our main efforts and resources are directed to: 1) Ensuring the Consistency of Law and Policy with International Standards; and 2) Protecting Persons of Concern from Violence, particularly Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

With reference to the first priority let me mention the progress made in the Prevention of Statelessness and protection of stateless persons. Further to commitments subscribed in the Commemoration Event in 2011, five countries in the Americas acceded and/or ratified one or both of the Statelessness instruments. Many others are close to acceding and ratifying, making the Americas the region with the highest number of accessions and ratifications since the Commemorations.

The accession to instruments and the establishment of stateless determination procedures has been accompanied with concrete protection responses. Let me cite a few examples: In the Dominican Republic UNHCR has implemented in the past two years a documentation project that has provided 5,500 documents (passports and birth certificates). The recipients of documentation

were children of Haitian mothers in mixed couples. The fact that the children obtain the Haitian nationality is a first and essential step to obtain the Dominican nationality from the father. Another group was children of Haitian immigrants under two years, who otherwise would not have any proof of nationality.

Turning to the protection of refugees, in 2012 the Ecuadorian government revised the Decree that regulates refugee status determination. We have shared our concerns in relation to the impact of limited timelines to submit asylum claims as well as the introduction of pre admissibility requirements. The High Commissioner will shortly forward the results of our analysis of the impact of the Decree to the President of Ecuador and looks forward to a discussion on maintaining rights to asylum and rights in asylum in Ecuador.

In Canada, the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act entered into force in December 2012. The Act introduces the notion of designated country of origin as well as appeal procedures for certain categories of asylum seekers and refugees. As stated to our interlocutors in Canada, UNHCR recognizes Canada's efforts to preserve the integrity of the system and prevent abuses. UNHCR remains ready to provide the required support to ensure that international standards for persons deserving protection are met.

Madame Chair,

The last quarter of 2012 marked the initiation of talks to end the conflict between the Government of Colombia and the FARC. UNHCR shares the hope of many Colombians to see the end of a conflict that has caused so much suffering for such a long time.

At this point, UNHCR finds extremely important to continue our protection and prevention work in favour of persons at risk of displacement or displaced. We believe that despite the firm efforts

and will of the Colombian government, the end of conflict may not mean the end of violence and that the humanitarian needs cannot be overlooked.

In Colombia, we continue to be committed to work with the government in finding solutions. Here, I need to mention the achievements of the Transitional Solutions Initiative. TSI in Colombia is a collaborative effort of UNDP and UNHCR that counts with the full support of the Colombian government at central and local levels. A three years' initiative that will provide a concrete and practical methodology to design solutions suitable for urban integration, relocation in rural areas and return for IDPs. I wish to take the opportunity to thank donors who supported the initiation of TSI in five communities that this year will be expanded to twelve and that will result in an innovative contribution to a Comprehensive solutions plan for Colombia.

The regional overview provides information on our work in Central America and our current limited involvement in forced displacement caused by violence and criminality. This is a major concern in that part of the region and UNHCR is providing the required technical advice to monitor displacement and the impact on certain segment of the affected population. We are well aware of the multiple dimensions and causes of this problem and we will frame our engagement in aspects pertaining to our mandate and in a collaborative effort with other UN agencies and actors.

As Director of the Bureau for the Americas, I have made a personal commitment to report to this Committee on the advancement in the mainstreaming of Age, Gender and Diversity approach in our protection and solutions work. This time I would like to focus on the work related to the implementation of the SGBV multi year strategy launched in 2011. The majority of the countries in the Americas count with a strategy that has been developed in partnerships with civil society and governments.

Standard operating procedures related to the response, protection and prevention of SGBV have been adopted. But again, let me give you a few examples of concrete progress:

In Colombia, UNFPA and UNHCR have developed a SGBV Information system. Improving the registration and sharing of data among responders and already benefitting nearly 500 survivors.

In Haiti, the first safe house for LGBTI survivors of Sexual and Gender Based violence was opened last year.

Capacity was developed with civil society and government partners as well as UNHCR staff to raise awareness and sensitivity to the protection needs of LGBTI persons of concern.

Focus on Addressing Protection Gaps and Solutions in the Urban Context.

In November 2014 the 30th Anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration will be commemorated. This will represent an opportunity for the region to shape its protection and solutions agenda for the next decade.

This was the clear message received by the members of MERCOSUR and associated states that met in Fortaleza, Brazil in late 2012. I am confident that this commitment will resonate elsewhere in the Continent.

The Bureau for the Americas remains ready to provide support to the preparation of the agenda for Cartagena @30 in full understanding of the leading role of States and the need to ensure the valuable input of civil society, academia, but first and foremost by persons of concern.

The Americas has a precious opportunity to build on its commitment to:

- Improve and consolidate asylum systems
- Realize the rights in asylum
- Innovate in using the strengths of states, local government, private and civil society partners, host populations and persons of concern in finding solutions.

I thank you Madame Chair and distinguished delegates.