

Thank you Mr Chairman,

Your Excellency Ambassador Comissário,
Mr. Deputy High Commissioner,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this distinguished audience as the new Director of the Bureau for the Americas. I am looking forward to working with you and offer UNHCR's support for the advancement of protection and solutions agendas in the Americas to the benefit of persons of our mutual concern, especially those who are most at risk.

Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action

2014 closed with a major achievement. Nearly all States in the entire continent met in Brasilia, under the auspices of the Brazilian Government, on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, to analyse and discuss current regional protection challenges and opportunities and to agree on concrete actions and solutions-oriented programmes. These were spelled out in the landmark Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action.

For UNHCR, the *Cartagena +30* process reaffirmed the commitment of Latin America and Caribbean countries to work together and uphold high international and regional protection standards enshrined in an existing

regional cooperation framework. “Cartagena” has acquired the status of an internationally recognized humanitarian brand, which reflects the commitment of Latin American and Caribbean countries to respond to humanitarian challenges with innovation and flexibility.

With the adoption of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, we are now equipped with a clear commitment and sound roadmap to strengthen regional solidarity and cooperation over the next 10 years.

We start a new chapter in advancing protection and solutions in the region by focusing on its implementation. Now, it is up to countries in the region to translate with firm determination these commitments into tangible actions that have a positive impact on the lives of refugees, displaced and stateless persons as well as of host communities. Together, I am confident that we can further consolidate our partnership in the region, building upon this solid foundation.

In concrete terms, by 2024, the implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action could result in the following:

- 7 or 8 countries, including those hosting sizeable refugee populations in the region, have harmonized and state of the art status determination systems (**Quality Asylum Program**).
- Persons most at risk, such as unaccompanied children and adolescents, victims of sexual and gender violence or human trafficking, are treated with

respect when crossing borders in search of safety and their needs are identified and met, and their dignity protected (**Borders of Solidarity and Safety Programs**).

- Colombian refugees and IDPs take part in the design of their own sustainable solutions, be it through voluntary repatriation/return or local integration [Consolidation of Peace].
- At least 50 cities of Latin America and the Caribbean are awarded a “**Solidarity Certificate**”. These would be communities which comply with internationally accepted integration benchmarks.
- The **Solidarity Resettlement Program** is self-funded and has realistic, predictable and viable quotas.
- Refugee labor mobility programs with built-in protection safeguards have been consolidated, at least in the MERCOSUR region (**Comprehensive Solutions Programs**).
- A Human Rights Observatory on Displacement within the Central American Integration System (SICA) is recognized internationally as a reference for analysis and production of protection tools to respond to the humanitarian needs of people displaced or at risks of being displaced by the violence caused by international organized crime.
- ‘Safe houses’ in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, also known as the Northern Triangle of Central America, and Mexico are a model for civil society

protection networks worldwide (**Solidarity with the Northern Triangle Programmes**).

- The Caribbean has implemented a self-developed protection and solutions strategy supported by the international community which allows countries to manage mixed migration flows using a human rights and refugee law framework (**Solidarity with the Caribbean**).
- And last but not least, the region has become the first to **eradicate statelessness** in response to the High Commissioner Global campaign launched last year.

Distinguished Chair and Delegates,

Bureau's priorities areas

This week, we will be discussing with Governments, in Sanremo, at a seminar hosted by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, priorities for the implementation of the Brazil Plan of Action in the next three years. In this framework, and without pre-empting the Sanremo discussion, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly highlight what UNHCR believes to be 5 priority areas:

1. Consolidating comprehensive solutions and supporting the Peace Process in Colombia

The Brazil Plan of Action has a strong focus on comprehensive solutions, which is a top priority for UNHCR.

For Colombian IDPs and refugees, developments with the Peace Dialogue in **Colombia** are promising and an agreement could be reached and endorsed in a national referendum before the end of this year. UNHCR is preparing to support the implementation of the Peace Agreement, particularly comprehensive solutions to ‘consolidate peace’, including through the Transition Solutions Initiative in 17 locations across the country, which is yielding key methodologies and lessons learned on sustainable solutions. We are also preparing to address new protection needs as they may arise during the consolidation of peace.

Beyond the Peace Dialogue, innovative approaches to solutions at the regional level can be further explored by using the example of flexibility and benefits from the MERCOSUR integration system. This year the Mercosur programme will be piloted by **Brazil and Ecuador** to benefit some 100 Colombian refugees in the next couple of years. This pilot, if successful, will enhance refugee access to remunerated work through labour mobility schemes that will also include built-in protection safeguards.

The Brazil Plan of Action recognizes local integration as a particularly challenging but crucial solution to the plight of refugees. Ecuador has been exemplary in facilitating the local integration of refugees by not only protecting them, but also giving refugees access to social services and livelihood opportunities. National legislation also

allows for local integration through naturalization and is an option being actively pursued with the authorities. To complement Government efforts to help find solutions for Colombian refugees, UNHCR's operation in Ecuador has been redesigned around a comprehensive solutions approach to maximize synergies with national development plans. I would also like to recognize Ecuador's efforts to strengthen refugee protection through the recent re-introduction of the extended refugee definition contained in Cartagena Declaration. Ecuador's protection and solutions undertakings, not to mention its generosity in hosting the highest number of refugees in the Latin America's region, merit the commendation and continued support of the international community.

The region continues to be a laboratory for new initiatives that encourages livelihoods and income-generating opportunities. To mention one, in **Costa Rica**, a sizeable number of refugees and asylum-seekers, in the last two years, found jobs through a corporate social responsibility program known as "Living through Integration" programme ("Vivir la Integración"), an alliance between the Costa Rican Migration Office, UNHCR, civil society, the Chamber of Commerce and over 100 private companies.

The strategic use of resettlement will continue to be a key component of our comprehensive solutions strategy. Solidarity resettlement countries have reaffirmed their commitment in the Brazil Plan of Action

and will be engaging in a joint evaluation to share experiences and good practices and consolidate the programme in line with the region's realities. We will support this process and hope to report the initial outcome at the July's Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement.

I would like to mention the continued critical support that the **United States of America** and **Canada** are providing to the larger UNHCR's agenda, including by responding to global resettlement needs. In 2014, approximately 55,000 refugees started a new life through resettlement in these countries alone, and many more are waiting do so.

2. Addressing displacement in and from Central America

Mr. Chairman,

the situation of people affected by violence and persecution by transnational organized criminal groups will continue to be at the top of our priorities. In the midst of many high profile crises around the world, the plight of Central Americans, in particular of those most at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents, is addressed with limited resources and not always through a protection lens. Immigration detention, including of women and children, is more and more used as a deterrent; deportations have increased exponentially, without due process and identification of

protection needs; and persons that may be of concern to UNHCR are sometimes prevented from gaining access to asylum procedures, or even to the territory.

Although the numbers have decreased slightly from last year's historic influx, they remain high. In the last three months of 2014, the U.S. detected 4,816 unaccompanied children from **The Northern Triangle of Central America**. This is in stark contrast to the pre-surge period when in 2010, apprehensions for the entire year totalled 4,444. While the causes of displacement are multiple, UNHCR's studies have found that between 48% and 58% of unaccompanied and separated children leave in search of international protection. This phenomenon is corroborated by the **US** authorities, who found 70% of Central Americans asylum claimants passing the strict threshold for access to asylum procedures (credible fear interview).

As part of a Regional Initiative launched last year for 2014-2017, UNHCR is trying to enhance its response by working closely with governments, the Central American Integration System (SICA), other UN agencies and the civil society, with three programmes in the Northern Triangle included in the Brazil Plan of Action. In particular, we would like to support the establishment of a Human Rights Observatory on Displacement, within Central American Integration System, to improve the understanding of the humanitarian and protection impact of displacement. In addition, we will continue to focus our efforts to make borders and transit zones

safer and dignified: prevention responses for populations in vulnerable situations; strengthen national protection mechanisms; improve the protection of unaccompanied children in border and transit areas – in line with best interest practices and non-discrimination and participation principles; set up protection and monitoring networks with civil society and Ombudsmen offices; support shelters in southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador; and assist States in putting in place identification, profiling and referral mechanisms and identify alternatives to detention. I trust we can continue to count on the political will of all concerned States, as indicated in the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action.

3. Promoting and supporting the consolidation of Common Asylum Spaces in the region

The Brazil Plan of Action strongly focuses on increased regional cooperation through the existing integration mechanisms. Several positive initiatives have great potential such as the regional forum of the Presidents of the National Eligibility Commissions in the case of MERCOSUR and in Central America. These fora can serve to develop common asylum policies, exchange best practices and promote improved protection standards, including on age, gender and diversity. We look forward to the consolidation of these efforts and are ready to help bring about effective cooperation.

Fostering regional harmonization of asylum standards and practice, guided by the jurisprudence of the Inter-

American Human Rights system, will be key to build quality asylum systems able to manage increasing number of asylum claims in an efficient manner. The Quality Assurance Initiative, currently implemented in **Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama**, is serving this purpose and can ultimately promote the possibility of a Common Asylum Space within MERCOSUR, Central American Integration System and CARICOM. It will also encourage opportunities for south-south cooperation and twinning projects among States for the exchange of good practices and the building of asylum systems.

I would like to acknowledge the solidarity shown by states in the region toward Syrian refugees. **Canada** pledged to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees while the **United States** indicated an open pledge to offer assistance to Syrian refugees through their resettlement program (already 11,000 are being considered). I would also like to highlight the contribution of **Uruguay** in offering to resettle more than 100 Syrian refugees from Lebanon. Through the granting of refugee status to arrivals or through generous humanitarian visas as offered by **Brazil and Argentina**, and the support of the local population, some 6,500 Syrian refugees now have an opportunity to build their future in their new countries. Other countries in the region have also expressed interest in responding to the call of the High Commissioner to provide resettlement or other forms of admission for Syrian refugees.

4. Strengthening protection and solutions response capacities in the Caribbean

The Caribbean region is now for the first time fully integrated in the Cartagena process; this represents a key achievement for the continent. We will be starting consultations with states to establish a Regional Consultative Mechanism to better address mixed migratory movements at sea, including rescue and disembarkation; identification of protection needs; alternatives to detention; and to find regional approaches to conduct refugee status determination. **Trinidad and Tobago** is in the process of establishing its asylum system and we stand ready to support this initiative as well as those of other Caribbean states and territories in with such laudable endeavours.

5. Continental eradication of Statelessness

Latin America and the Caribbean was the first region to join the High Commissioner's call to end statelessness in the next decade. We will work together to achieve this goal and encourage all countries to accede to international instruments on statelessness. I welcome the latest ratification to the 1954 Convention of **El Salvador** and I look forward to celebrating the accession to both Conventions by **Chile, Haiti** and other countries in the region in the near future.

We would also aim at increasing by one third the number of States that have aligned nationality laws with international standards to prevent and reduce statelessness, with particular focus on elimination of

gender discrimination in the passing of nationality; promotion of national protection legislation and establishment of stateless status determination procedures. In partnership with national authorities, UN agencies and the civil society, we stand ready to provide advice and support to find concrete solutions for stateless populations in the region, including the reacquisition of nationality and access to facilitated naturalization.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

After sharing with you the great potential in the region stemming from the forward-looking commitment adopted by States with the Brazil Plan of Action, let me nevertheless conclude by expressing concern over the difficult financial situation UNHCR is facing in 2015. The impact of necessary cost cutting measures that UNHCR has to implement are particularly harsh for operations in the Americas, especially at a time when an adequate level of engagement and limited extra efforts can propel the continent far in terms of protection and solution standards. I am hopeful that the international community will remain strongly engaged in addressing the critical protection challenges in the Americas, and those resources are made available so that, together, we can contribute to the realisation of an inspiring Brazil roadmap and can improve the situation for millions of persons of concern in the region.

Thank you Mr. Chair