

**International Stakeholders Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries**  
**2-3 May, 2012**

**Pakistan National Statement**

**BY**  
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Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to first express our gratitude to the representatives of Governments, international agencies and the civil society for their participation in this important conference.

Their participation is a manifestation of their interest in supporting voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

I would like to thank the High Commissioner for his leadership and tireless efforts that have culminated in this Conference. I also thank the Swiss Government for hosting this Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Afghan refugees left their homeland over three decades ago. They constitute the largest protracted refugee situation in the world. This is one of the most pressing issues in our region. Although there is international interest in this region, the situation of refugees is yet to receive the attention that it deserves.

Over the years we have seen foreign assistance diminish and international attention diverted from the plight of these refugees. With decreased international attention and limited foreign assistance, the burden on the host countries has increased tremendously.

In the spirit of our traditional hospitality, Pakistan has hosted Afghan refugees for decades. It is still host to about 1.7 million refugees. In terms of population growth, nearly 83,000 are added to the Afghan refugees population each year. As a result the increase in Afghan refugee population is higher than the number of individuals repatriated.

The lengthy stay of refugees and anemic repatriation efforts have given rise to political, security, socio-economic, financial and environmental challenges. This has placed a heavy burden on the society and contributed to a change in local perception of Afghan refugees and their continued stay in Pakistan.

The Government of Pakistan has set its vision for Afghan refugees in its Management and Repatriation Strategy 2010-2012. Voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees by December 2012 is at the heart of this strategy. It does not allow us to agree to any proposal which grants

Afghan refugees the status of economic migrants or any other status except for temporary management as per government approved Strategy.

We believe, therefore, the foremost priority of the international community should be to reenergize the repatriation process. Our preference is that refugee repatriation is voluntary, orderly and swift.

We understand that this would require a concerted effort to create conducive conditions inside Afghanistan. Pakistan is, therefore, keen to work with the international community, especially our Afghan brethren to create pull factors inside Afghanistan for an early return and sustainable reintegration of the refugees. To that end, we will have to create robust partnerships to focus on investment in high return areas inside Afghanistan,

Pakistan is convinced that the way forward lies in international cooperation and burden sharing. The Solutions Strategy would have three pillars: first, robust support for repatriation and resettlement programs; second, working with the Afghan Government to foster conditions inside Afghanistan for sustainable reintegration; and third, support for host countries to offset the burden they have been carrying for decades.

As we prepare for their return, it is critically important to strengthen synergies between the refugees and the host communities for instance by reinforcing the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA).

To be successful, we should ensure that the host countries and Afghanistan have full ownership of the strategies devised for refugees. The partnership between donors, the UNHCR and the three countries should take place within the framework devised by the individual countries. Enhancing the capacity of local institutions should be a critical objective.

The host countries need a clear demonstration that international donor community understands the challenges they face and that it is ready to share the burden they have been carrying for over three decades. UNHCR should also now focus on facilitating early and safe return of refugees to Afghanistan.

As the international community winds down its engagement in Afghanistan, return of refugees should be accorded high priority. In our view the return of Afghan refugees has to be an integral element of final settlement in Afghanistan.

I am confident if we work together we would be successful in ensuring the successful return to their homeland of the 3 million Afghan refugees still living in Pakistan and Iran.

I hope this conference and its communiqué will be known as a landmark event when the international community came together to express support for the voluntary return of Afghan refugees, their sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.