Statement by Ms. Oh Hyunjoo, Counsellor
Third Committee of the 68th Session of the General Assembly
Agenda Item 62: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions
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Mr. Chair,

My delegation commends the significant progress UNHCR has achieved during the past decade, as the High Commissioner also noted in the first decennial strategic review. It is also worth highlighting that UNHCR has remarkably strengthened its capacity to respond to both humanitarian emergencies and protracted situations in a successful way. We further note with satisfaction several years of the institutional reform initiatives taken by the Office in such areas as human resources, financial management, and internal oversight. In particular, a smaller but more effective staff in Geneva with increased management efficiency deserves credit.

There still remain, however, significant challenges and gaps to be addressed. As the High Commissioner rightly put it, the number of persons of concern to UNHCR has doubled in the last decade. More recently, the unprecedented humanitarian crisis unfolding in Syria, coupled with the existing protracted refugee situation, has been stretching UNHCR’s capacity to the limit. The gaps between the resources available and globally assessed needs
for protection of people of concern have been growing yearly.

In this vein, my delegation wishes to emphasize two points.

First, we need to focus more on UNHCR’s core mandate of protecting refugees and other people of concern. Specifically, my delegation would like to recall the principle of *non-refoulement*, a cornerstone of UNHCR’s protection mandate. My delegation notes with great concern the report of the High Commissioner which stated that there still remain cases of forced repatriation in most regions in 2012. We are particularly concerned about the persistent risk of *refoulement* in the case of refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Taking this opportunity, my delegation once again urges all States to uphold the principle of *non-refoulement* and requests UNHCR to continue to make efforts to ensure universal application of this norm of customary international law.

Second, UNHCR should continue its efforts to strengthen its cooperative partnership with other actors, including NGOs and development agencies. My delegation appreciates that UNHCR has made the spirit of partnership a top priority to avoid duplication and create synergies in its work. However, unprecedented humanitarian situations, notably those in Syria, revealed that there remains room for improvement with partnerships, to achieve an even more efficient delivery of assistance and protection. With regard to the implementing partners, in particular, through which 60 percent of the Office’s global operations are channeled, a more structured partnership is of critical importance to ensure the transparency and accountability of UNHCR.

Mr. Chair,

The Republic of Korea has been among those joining the international community in providing continual assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

The government of the Republic of Korea has recently decided to provide multi-year contributions amounting to 18 million USD from 2013 to 2015 through UNHCR for Afghan returnees. Domestically, as of July 1, 2013, the Refugee Act and its Enforcement Decree entered into force. The law requires that basic social services be provided to asylum seekers. Moreover, an independent refugee division was created in the Ministry of Justice in June 2013 and a Center for Refugee Assistance was constructed in Incheon in September 2013.
Mr. Chair,

As the Chair country of the 2014 Executive Committee of UNHCR, the Republic of Korea would like to reaffirm our unswerving commitment to UNHCR’s goal of ensuring protection for all people of concern and will continue to work with UNHCR and the international community to protect and assist those in great need.

Thank you. /End/