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STATEMENT

BY

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Third Committee debate on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Guterres, for his comprehensive report this year.

This is a very important issue for my country, Afghanistan. The refugee experience is one we know intimately; it has been a central part of the history of my country since conflict started decades ago. Years of violence, brutality, and wars have forced over ten million Afghan men, women and children from their villages and towns to neighboring countries and to countries across the globe. Today, nearly five million Afghans live in Iran and Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of others live in various other countries throughout the world. Afghanistan still has more nationals living outside its borders as refugees than any other country.

Mr. Chairman,

The government of Afghanistan, along with our international partners, UNHCR in particular, remains diligently involved in wide-reaching programs to facilitate the return of refugees. To this end, Afghanistan’s experience constitutes the largest repatriation movement in modern history, with 6 million refugees returning to the country since 2002. Voluntary repatriation programs have assisted the return of 4.6 million of these returnees. For refugees without land, a special Presidential decree provides refugees with plots of land for which to build shelters. In 61 sites and 29 provinces throughout the country, 115,000 families have been selected as beneficiaries the program.

Support offered by the international community, has been essential for refugees to return and reintegrate back into the country in a way that is voluntary, safe, sustainable and dignified. We welcome the outcome of the International conference in Geneva in May 2012, which brought the Governments of the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, UNHCR and donors together to endorse a Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. The strategy pursues voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries, and facilitates the improvement of livelihoods of those returning to Afghanistan. To this end, we underscore the importance of fulfillment of obligations under international refugee law with respect to protection of refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite these successes, ensuring the provision of necessary services for Afghans returning from abroad remains a great challenge for the government of Afghanistan. Many returned refugees are facing reintegration difficulties including lack of land, shelter, safe drinking water, and basic services such as health care and education. Addressing the needs of returnees on such a massive scale requires on the one hand long-term social and economic development programs, and on the other hand capacity building programs through the National Development Strategy and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR). Both depend heavily on international donor support.

In addition, a challenging security environment hinders refugees from returning to Afghanistan, and often prevents those who have returned from resettlement. It is tragic that some return to their homeland seeking a prosperous future only to be faced with despair. We are certain that the
improvement of security and stability in Afghanistan will provide the refugees with more incentives to return, and our long-term efforts towards peace, security, and stability will further enable the sustainable return of refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to take this opportunity to express the government of Afghanistan’s heartfelt appreciation and sincere gratitude to governments that continue to host Afghan refugees, the Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran in particular. During the past decades they have shouldered an enormous burden, which we in Afghanistan see as a demonstration of their solidarity to their Afghan neighbours. We welcome the decision of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to extend its welcome to Afghan refugees for another year.

Also, I would like to offer special thanks and appreciation to UNHCR for its tireless work for Afghan refugees. As the High Commissioner’s report points out, the agency facilitated the repatriation of 98,600 Afghans back to the country in 2012, and has been deeply involved in other projects for Afghanistan’s most vulnerable refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, we thank once again the international community and UNHCR in particular for its continued and sustained support to ensure the voluntary, safe, and sustainable return, rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees in Afghanistan.

I thank you.