Statement by:
H.E. Mr. Gholamhossein Dehghani
Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of
The Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations

At The Third Committee of the 68th Session of the UNGA
Agenda item 62 on
UN High Commissioner for Refugees

New York, 6 November 2013

In the name of God the compassionate the merciful

Mr. Chairman,

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world. During the last three decades Iran hosted more than 3 million refugees who have come mainly from Afghanistan and Iraq. Today, the majority of the refugees in Iran reside in urban areas while, they are being provided with their basic needs and essential services as well as Community empowerment and self-reliance.

The Islamic Republic of Iran with the new government in power has actively engaged with the UNHCR as well as the UN Humanitarian system. Foreign Minister Zarif has reviewed with the UN High Commissioner for refugees the most recent situation of refugees late September. Moreover, the Iranian delegation in Geneva has actively engaged with UNHCR ExCom 2013.

Iran has continuously improved the health status of the refugee population across the country, through among others access to free primary health care for registered refugees. At least 80 percent of the refugee population benefit from health insurance, covering secondary and tertiary treatments. Education is provided for the children and
adults of the refugees. Today, 320,000 Afghan students go to school and 8000 go to universities in Iran.

Self-reliance and livelihoods of the refugees in Iran are improved and many of them have access to self-employment and small-business opportunities, facilitated by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These are all being done despite the unilateral economic and financial pressures and sanctions on Iran by some states.

Mr. Chairman

For more than a decade now, a government that enjoys broad international support has been in power in Afghanistan. However millions of Afghan refugees, despite their heartfelt yearning desire to return, continue to live in host countries due to the lack of facilities for local integration. The fact is that enough efforts have not been made by the international community for the betterment of the conditions for the return of Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran to their country and at the same time, assistance to the returnees is very low in comparison with the level of relevant costs.

Mr. Chairman

Voluntary repatriation to motherland in safety and dignity is an inalienable right of refugees. We have always supported the realization of this right and the practical and constructive engagement of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the reconstruction programs of Afghanistan has been a clear evidence of this policy. However, realization of durable repatriation in safety and dignity requires adequate support of international community aiming at redressing their life according to minimum social welfare standards.

Another solution for the plight of the refugees is resettlement. The Islamic Republic of Iran appreciates resettlement countries especially, those of the contact group. However, my country notices that the relevant admission figures at the resettlement countries are very low in comparison with the huge number of refugees and the problems resulting thereof. Given the endeavors taken during year 2012, only 1272 Afghan refugees have departed Iran within the framework of resettlement.

Moreover, the total figure of the resettlement cases from 1999 until now has been only 12000 individuals while the average birth rate of the refugees in Iran is annually 40000.

Mr. Chairman,

The “International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries” during which, mechanisms for the return of Afghan refugees were discussed
and consulted, was held in May 2012 in Geneva. Following this trend, important efforts were made and new structures namely, Quadripartite Steering Committee as well as National Steering Committee were established. In this regard, different briefing meetings were also held with the participation of donor countries.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that if the results of this conference could be implemented and operationalized, this would contribute to the solution of the plight of refugees and at the same time, the heavy economic and social burden on the shoulder of the host countries could decrease.

Now a window of opportunity is open in front of the International Community to meet the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan and provide necessary funds in different fields in order to enhance the trend of voluntary repatriation and realize a long lasting dream of Afghan refugees and displaced persons for returning to their homeland. Moreover, parallel to this measure, the International Community can play its role vis-à-vis this global problem by allocating necessary and adequate funds to the development of educational and health environments, facilities and equipments for Afghan refugees in Iran.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, more positive, supportive and constructive engagement of the international system is a must in improving the situation of the millions of refugees, especially Afghan refugees in the host countries. This in turn can only be made possible through better collaboration, more support and further practical participation of all members of the international community to progress from promise to practice.

Thank you very much.