Statement

by

Ambassador Masood Khan,
Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations

on

agenda item 62: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

at

the Third Committee

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Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' comprehensive reports on global refugees’ situation and the decennial Strategic Review of UNHCR operations. The reports give a valuable insight into the difficult refugee situations around the world.

Mr. Chairman,

It is a matter of concern for all of us that the year 2012 witnessed the largest number of refugees of this century. This signifies the continuing relevance and important role of UNHCR in the foreseeable future. Pakistan appreciates the generous humanitarian assistance provided by the neighboring countries and the international community to the new wave of refugees from Syria and in the Sahel and the Great Lakes region.

These refugee situations need our urgent attention; and we laud the UNHCR for responding to these emergencies. At the same time, we wish to emphasize that protracted refugee situations around the world must not be ignored or left entirely to the host countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan has one of the longest and extensive partnerships with UNHCR. The UNHCR has also partnered with us as the lead agency for the protection cluster to provide humanitarian assistance in the disaster affected areas.

Year after year, Pakistan has remained on top of the list of refugee-hosting countries. The UNHCR report under review confirms that even in 2012, Pakistan still hosts the largest number of refugees from neighboring Afghanistan.

Over the decades, Pakistan has cooperated with the UNHCR to ensure that these refugees remain safe and secure inside Pakistan and are provided with all basic amenities of life as well as access to education and means of communication.

Mr. Chairman,

Thirty three years is a long time for any country to host millions of refugees. Pakistan is still hosting more than three million registered and undocumented Afghan refugees.
Keeping in view the difficult economic and security situation inside Afghanistan, voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees seems to be the only feasible option. Unfortunately, lack of adequate pull-factors in Afghanistan and continued instability have discouraged voluntary return of refugees, leading to a protracted refugee situation in Pakistan and the resulting serious socio-economic consequences for local populations.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite the dwindling financial and material support of the international community, the resolve and commitment of the Government and people of Pakistan to generously host Afghan refugees has not weakened. We are doing this in a spirit of humanity.

Earlier this year, the Government of Pakistan signed another agreement with the Government of Afghanistan and the UNHCR to extend the stay of Afghan refugees till December 2015. This demonstrates Pakistan’s continued commitment to Afghan refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the generosity of our people, the capacity of the Government of Pakistan to indefinitely host millions of refugees should not be overestimated. Pakistan is now witnessing birth of third generation Afghan refugees. This is a unique refugee situation, which entails serious long-term socio-economic, political and ecological consequences.

Over the decades, Pakistan has huge costs. Economies of the two provinces - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan - have borne the maximum burden but so have other provinces.

It is not dignified for the Afghan refugees to live in temporary shelters permanently. They must return to their homeland.

Mr. Chairman,

Political stability and return of refugees are inter-related issues. Afghanistan is moving towards political, security and economic transitions. We want all these transitions to succeed. Pakistan supports Afghanistan's efforts to create conditions
for stability and economic reconstruction and development. A peaceful, stable and economically developing Afghanistan will create conditions conducive for refugees’ return, repatriation and assimilation. The planned transitions in Afghanistan must also address the issue of refugees living in Pakistan.

What Pakistan dreads most is a fresh influx of refugees from Afghanistan post-2014. We will not be able to absorb them. Therefore, effective steps should be taken right now to stem new flows of refugees from Afghanistan.

Recent international conferences have secured pledges of billions of dollars for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. There pledges must also factor in the repatriation and rehabilitation of the returning refugees.

We call upon the international community to help the people and Government of Afghanistan to take serious steps for creation of a safe and conducive environment in their country so that the Afghan refugees can voluntarily return to their homeland for permanent resettlement. This will not only ensure their participation in the rebuilding of their war-ravaged country, but will also play a positive role in political stabilization of Afghanistan and the entire region.

I thank you.