As delivered

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the ninth year in which I have the honor to address this Committee. But this time my presentation includes both UNHCR’s annual report and a 10-year Strategic Review, which takes stock of the major evolutions in refugee protection over the past decade and how they shape our outlook for the future.

This comes at an appropriate time, as we stand at a critical juncture. The number of persons of concern to UNHCR has doubled in the last ten years and what is more, refugees are crossing borders at the highest rate in nearly two decades. By the end of 2013, some two million people across the world will have been forced to flee their country – the highest number in any year since the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

The last three years have been marked by a quick succession of large-scale displacement emergencies, from Libya and Côte d’Ivoire to Somalia and Mali. Today, not only are we still dealing with the aftermath of these crises, but on top of that, we are now confronted with the huge refugee outflow caused by the tragedy in Syria. About 1.7 million Syrians have fled their country since January alone, in addition to the hundreds of thousands who became refugees across Africa – from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Mali, to Somalia. Millions more were displaced inside their own countries.

Together with our partners, we are doing everything possible to respond, but our limits are being severely tested by this combination of an emergency unparalleled in the recent past, and the persistence of all the other crises around the world.
Looking back at the decade that has passed since the first Strategic Review was presented to this Committee, significant reforms and investments have been made to ensure my Office is up to the increasingly complex tasks entrusted to it. While there continue to be areas for improvement, I would like to underline six factors that have been central in boosting our ability to deliver under growing pressure. They will remain essential as the world continues to confront unresolved displacement and new, often unpredictable crises in the next decade.

The first element, and indeed the single most important factor in ensuring the effective protection of refugees, is the generosity of **host countries and local communities**. Most governments affected by recent displacement have allowed refugees to find safety. Many have provided shelter, access to schools and health care, and even in some cases, permission to work.

The burden of hosting refugees is distributed unevenly across the world – a gap that is widening. More than 80% of today’s refugees are hosted by developing countries, up from 70% a decade ago. Sustaining the international refugee protection system will require enhanced support to host countries and more serious efforts by the international community towards meaningful solidarity and burden-sharing. The current crisis in Syria, and the enormous impact which 2.2 million registered refugees are having on the economies and societies of neighboring countries namely Lebanon and Jordan, are a case in point. For this reason, we recently dedicated a High-Level Segment during the 64th session of our Executive Committee to solidarity and burden-sharing with countries hosting Syrian refugees.

The second factor in allowing us to respond has been **strong financial support from donors**. UNHCR depends almost entirely on voluntary funding, which has reached unprecedented levels over the past decade, increasing from 929 million USD in 2003 to a record 2.3 billion in 2012. That record will again be surpassed significantly in 2013. The needs-based budget, introduced in 2010, together with the Global Strategic Priorities and the Results Framework has proven an important advocacy tool for showing the real, human consequences of funding short-falls, and for broadening UNHCR’s donor base. We have also invested strongly in private sector fundraising in recent years, and support has grown from 22 million USD in 2003 to an expected 170 million this year.

Nevertheless, significant funding gaps remain, and achieving a balance between current emergencies – and most notably now the Syria crisis – and persistent humanitarian needs elsewhere poses a major challenge. I commend those countries that have been making efforts to use additional budget sources for Syria, so as to minimize the negative impact on other operations, including those where we have opportunities – and an imperative – to bring protracted situations to a close. But several regions – and most notably Africa – have been struggling with a decrease in earmarked funding in 2013.
The third crucial factor in our response has been **partnerships**. UNHCR has invested a lot in reinforcing its long-standing partnerships, forging new ones and trying to provide better support to its partners, both in refugee emergencies and in cluster situations. We now spend twice as much through our partners than we did in 2006, working with over 900 non-governmental organizations world-wide and with an increased percentage of local NGOs.

Partnerships with operational UN agencies have also grown even more central to our work. UNHCR and the World Food Programme have recently opened new avenues for cooperation, focusing on cash and voucher-based assistance, and reorienting refugee food aid to increase self-reliance and enhance local economies. With UNICEF, we have strengthened our partnership on education, child protection and water and sanitation at the country level, and sought to make our cooperation in emergencies more effective and predictable. UNHCR has also deepened its collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank, including most recently in the countries neighboring Syria.

A Structured Dialogue launched two years ago aims to improve the way we work with NGO partners and the Red Cross and Red Crescent family. At the same time, we are firmly committed to the implementation of the Transformative Agenda, in close cooperation with OCHA and members of the Inter Agency Standing Committee. Adjustments to our own procedures in this context have also provided an opportunity to review and improve our leadership approaches and coordination mechanisms for refugee operations.

The enormous needs created by the Syria crisis are a testing ground for many of these measures, for example through the Regional Response Plan for Syrian refugees, which now includes some 100 partners and host governments. Partnership efforts in the region are now focused on merging humanitarian and development tracks into a comprehensive approach to benefit both refugees and their host communities.

Partnership is also becoming more important as one in two refugees now live in urban areas. We are expanding our work with partners, national institutions and community-based organizations to explore new approaches to displacement in out-of-camp settings. This requires better outreach and communication and more support to national services, so that refugees do not simply become invisible in urban areas and add to the struggles of local populations who themselves are often at risk.

For this, we must pursue more integrated approaches that anchor the refugee response within the broader framework of national and local development efforts. The idea is not to divert scarce development resources to the refugee response or to use even more limited humanitarian funding to promote development objectives, but rather to achieve alignment, complementaritity and synergies between the two.
The fourth element that has enabled us to strengthen delivery is **our internal reform process**. Between 2006 and 2012, headquarters costs dropped from nearly 14% to 8% of overall expenditure, including Budapest, while staff costs fell from 41% to 26% within the same period, even though protection work is necessarily labor-intensive. Since 2006, our operations have more than doubled in size, but we only have 13% more staff globally, and a reduction of 32% in Geneva.

Through this strong increase in productivity and parallel decrease in relative structural costs, UNHCR is directing more and more resources to protection, assistance and solutions for the people we serve. Last year, nearly all unearmarked funding was used in the field and only 3% in headquarters. This provided vital flexibility to ensure uninterrupted program delivery for forgotten situations – both protracted and emergencies – particularly in Africa. Just to give an example, only in South Sudan we are today applying about 65 million dollars of unearmarked funding, because earmarked funding for that situation is clearly insufficient.

The reform efforts helped to improve delivery where it counts most – in the field. As the structural reforms started to take hold, UNHCR turned towards strengthening the delivery of its mandate especially in two core operational priorities: emergency response and protection capacity. Through better deployment mechanisms and more efficient global supply management, we have markedly increased our 72-hour emergency response capacity, from 250,000 to 600,000 beneficiaries. And with protection recognized as the core of everything we do, there are now 50% more protection staff across the globe compared to ten years ago, even if we have a very strict policy in relation to staff increases across the board.

The reform process has been accompanied by a heightened emphasis on internal oversight and accountability. Priorities include bolstering UNHCR’s financial management and program oversight capability, professionalizing our approach to risk management, and strengthening accountability throughout all operations. The Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, created in 2012, provides valuable advice and support in this effort, allowing for coordination of the different oversight mechanisms.

Work continues to modernize UNHCR’s human resource management – a particularly difficult challenge, as you know, in the UN context. Fast-track assignments in emergency operations have been sped up significantly, and new recruitment programs were launched for entry-level personnel as well as specialist expertise. The Global Learning Center, established in Budapest in 2009, administered over 9,000 individual learning activities to UNHCR staff, to our affiliate workforce and to external partners last year.

The fifth aspect of our response strategy, and one we are intending to grow further, is **innovation**, a crucial tool to do more with less while taking advantage of the
creativity offered by the private sector, staff and refugees themselves and the new opportunities generated by technology advances.

Finally, none of the achievements of the past decade would have been possible without the dedication and professionalism of UNHCR staff. Some 40% of our staff serve in non-family duty stations, many of them in very dangerous environments. This is a high percentage even for the UN system, and too often it comes at a bitter price. Nearly every year we mourn lives lost in the line of duty – 43 in total since the organization was established. Almost half of these deaths occurred since the beginning of this new century, as humanitarian action becomes a more and more dangerous business.

To minimize the risks, we must do everything possible to preserve the autonomy of humanitarian space, which means strictly maintaining and clearly communicating our commitment to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

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Excellencies,

Allow me to highlight next some of the fundamental developments in protection during this past decade, and the key challenges that remain before us.

There have been several important advances in protection, most notably through increased international cooperation. This was clearly illustrated two years ago during the commemorations of the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. At a Ministerial event organized on this occasion, more than 100 States made pledges to strengthen their national policies and legislation for protection and for durable solutions.

Perhaps the most visible progress has been made in statelessness, previously one of the most neglected issues on the international human rights agenda. Since UNHCR’s awareness campaign began in 2010, there have been 30 new accessions to the two statelessness conventions – a 30% increase to the number of states parties in less than three years. In addition, many countries have taken steps to reform their nationality laws so as to reduce statelessness – in the past twelve months this was the case in Côte d’Ivoire, the Russian Federation, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

Some 4 million people have been able to acquire a nationality thanks to changes in legislation and policy over the past ten years. Yet there still remains a lot of work to be done. Next year’s 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention on stateless people is an occasion to focus on the everyday impact which statelessness has on the estimated
ten million people it afflicts worldwide. I hope States will use this opportunity to make meaningful progress towards the goal of eradicating statelessness within the next decade. This is an ambitious goal, but it is one I believe we should be able to reach together.

A second major emphasis of our protection work over the last ten years has been to strengthen our fundamental accountability to the people we are mandated to protect. Efforts to mainstream age and gender awareness into UNHCR’s operations began in 2004, but have since grown into an age, gender and diversity approach that fundamentally shapes the way our persons of concern participate in the design and delivery of programs worldwide. This approach recognizes the unique needs and resources of each person and has helped us enhance the protection of women, children, persons with disabilities and others.

Our increased attention to the prevention of and response to sexual and gender based violence has stemmed from this approach. Since our updated SGBV Strategy was launched in 2011, twenty large operations have developed and implemented country-specific strategies adapted to their local context. And in 2013, we have strongly invested in our SGBV response, particularly in emergencies related to Syrian and Malian refugees.

A number of special SGBV projects have expanded existing services for survivors and supported critical investments, like the establishment of safe houses, in many operations across the world. The projects have included measures ranging from psychosocial support and legal counseling to self-defense training, access to livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities. Most recently, we have placed a particular institutional emphasis on improving monitoring and evaluation as well as SGBV knowledge and data management.

The protection of internally displaced persons has been a third focus of the past decade, with fundamental changes in the way humanitarian agencies respond to their needs. The UN humanitarian reform initiated in 2005 has brought about more predictability in operational programs, and has helped to reduce both duplication and gaps, while reaffirming in all situations the primary responsibility of States for the protection of the internally displaced. There have also been important normative advances, such as the adoption of the African Union’s Kampala Convention in 2009, the first internationally binding instrument for the rights of the internally displaced.

More recently however, international attention in this area has dwindled. Fifteen years after the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were developed, humanitarian actors like UNHCR find it increasingly difficult to mobilize funding for the protection of those displaced within the borders of their own countries.

For this reason, this year’s High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December will look at persistent gaps and possible solutions for the protection of
internally displaced persons. It will be the sixth such Dialogue since 2007, and it is my hope that, like its predecessors, it will be a useful platform for a broad array of governments and other actors to shape creative new approaches to some of the most complex contemporary challenges to protection.

The fourth protection issue that I would like to highlight is the work UNHCR is doing at the intersection of asylum and migration. As more and more refugees and asylum-seekers travel in mixed migratory flows, safeguards to identify them and ensure they have access to appropriate protection mechanisms have become increasingly important, both at the national and regional levels.

The risks and dangers faced today by refugees, asylum seekers and others on the move underline the urgency of these efforts. As people are often forced to rely on the services of smugglers, they are exposed to harassment and exploitation, beatings, the risk of trafficking, or even death. The horrific, large-scale abuses suffered by smuggling and trafficking victims from the East and Horn of Africa is one such example. The dramatic and worrying increase in casualties as a result of irregular maritime movements is another.

As hundreds of people seeking protection lose their lives at sea year after year, the need for coordinated, protection-minded regional responses to address such mixed flows becomes ever more urgent. From the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Aden, from the Asia Pacific region to the Caribbean, we need a pact of solidarity, based on burden-sharing and common but differentiated responsibilities of the affected States. There is something fundamentally wrong when so many people must die while trying to reach protection. Much more must be done for States to come together and effectively crack down on smugglers and traffickers, while also finding more humane ways to care for the victims. People fleeing violence and persecution should be able to access protection without having to risk their lives and to suffer brutal violations of their human rights.

Allow me a final point on protection. As forced displacement evolves in an increasingly complex global environment, the institution of asylum is coming under growing pressure, including in some countries in the developed world. Refugees and asylum seekers often find it difficult to access safety, hampered by border management policies lacking safeguards for people in need of international protection. Substandard reception arrangements, the disproportionate use of detention, and the absence of adequate burden-sharing arrangements among states are our main concerns. In addition, not all societies are doing enough to fight intolerance, racism and racially-motivated violence, which pose serious risks to the safety of refugees and other foreigners. These threats to international protection will require closer attention from States in the decade ahead.

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Distinguished Delegates,

Finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced people remains the ultimate goal of UNHCR’s work, and its biggest challenge in a global environment marked by many protracted conflicts. While over 7 million refugees were able to voluntarily repatriate since 2003, their number has been much lower in the second half of the past decade. In recent years, the number of new refugees has in fact exceeded that of people who were able to leave displacement. This only underlines the urgency of reinvigorating the way we look at solutions, at the country level, regionally and institutionally. Solutions must be seen not as a distinct event, but rather as an ongoing effort throughout the duration of displacement which needs to be incorporated into humanitarian operations from the start of an emergency.

There is some encouraging progress, notably in resettlement, which has benefited over 800,000 people in the past ten years. The number of resettlement countries has risen from 16 in 2003 to 27 today. We have roughly doubled our annual resettlement submissions. But still, global capacity continues to fall short of the needs that exist.

UNHCR is now focusing increasingly on comprehensive solutions strategies, which promote return, resettlement and local integration, where possible, in tandem and in a complementary manner. Good progress has recently been made with this for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees. Over 300,000 of them were able to return home in 2012, while the way is being prepared for the local integration of many others.

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees prepared with the Islamic Republics of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan is another noteworthy example of a broader approach. It fosters both interventions in Afghanistan to help create conducive conditions for return, and projects in the two neighboring countries to assist communities that generously continue to host some 2.5 million Afghan refugees.

The Transitional Solutions Initiative with UNDP and other partners, is also helping refugees to become self-reliant. Many other of UNHCR’s partnerships efforts are increasingly geared towards reducing the risk of prolonged aid dependency.

Finally, the use of legal migratory frameworks can offer refugees in protracted situations and without proper status an alternative path if traditional durable solutions are unavailable, provided that adequate protection safeguards are in place.

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The reforms and investments of the past decade have allowed UNHCR to be better prepared for the challenges of the present time. Global forced displacement has become more widespread, protracted and complex than ever before. And the current environment we live in – one marked by multiplying conflicts, population growth, rapid urbanization, food insecurity and the effects of climate change – is likely to result in a further dramatic rise in humanitarian needs in the years to come.

Let me therefore conclude my remarks with what I believe are the key factors that must underpin UNHCR’s response in the decade ahead.

First, continued close collaboration with States. Theirs will always be the most fundamental contribution to refugee protection and to the achievement of durable solutions. This will increasingly require also regional approaches, which we are fully ready to support.

Second, as we work to integrate a solutions approach into humanitarian programs from the earliest days of a refugee crisis, we must also take a broader perspective. More has to be done to address the root causes that force people to flee, so as to prevent displacement from occurring in the first place.

Third, there is a growing challenge to maintain space for asylum and protection, given the increasing imbalance in the burden of hosting refugees between rich and poor countries. Enhanced international solidarity with refugee hosting states and communities must therefore be a key pillar of any global response to forced displacement.

And fourth, one of the essential conditions both for durable solutions and for more support to those hosting large refugee populations is a stronger link between humanitarian relief and longer-term development programs. The work that is now underway with the World Bank, UNDP and other partners in some countries surrounding Syria, to create closer synergies between the humanitarian emergency programs and structural development assistance to the host countries, provides a key learning opportunity for the international community in this regard. This is one of the “transformative shifts” that will need to be at the center of the discussion about the post-2015 agenda for integrated and sustainable development.

And finally, as UNHCR continues to enhance its partnerships and coordination mechanisms, ensuring the integrity of its uniquely strong legal mandate will remain of key importance to the success of our work.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The principle of giving refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution is a universal value. At its core, it is not the product of modern civilization, and much less an invention after the Second World War. As last year’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges confirmed, this principle is deeply rooted in all of the world’s major religions and runs through all cultures. Throughout human memory, people everywhere have sheltered strangers who desperately needed their help.

Let us stand together to protect this fundamental human value, for the millions of people around the world who depend on it. And let us join our efforts to make sure that those who help them are supported by the international community in doing so.

Thank you very much.