

Statement by H.E. Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai, Ambassador/ Permanent Representative of Nepal at the 60th Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Geneva, September 30, 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates.

My delegation extends warm congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to the chair of the Executive Committee.

Nepal commends the leadership of the High Commissioner for Refugees H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres in this challenging and difficult time.

We welcome the comprehensive and insightful statement by the High Commissioner the other day that outlines his strategic vision for the year ahead and updates on the continuing reform process, achievements made and challenges to be confronted by the organization in its efforts to the implementation of the mandate focusing on the protection, finding durable solutions, care and maintenance of refugee population worldwide.

We commend High Commissioner's resolute commitment and his continued priority to the protracted refugee situations, which are a reflection of challenges to human rights. We welcome his deep attachment to the plight of millions of refugees forced to flee their home in search of safety, security and protection of their inherent human dignity. We also applaud his commitment to redress the inexplicable agony of millions of uprooted people.

Nepal supports the High Commissioner's protection priorities built on the 10 point commitments outlined two years ago. The role of the UNHCR in protection and delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people in distress due to forced eviction, violence, natural and man-made calamities and conflicts is laudable. We salute the courage and commitment of the UNHCR staff to serve the cause of humanity even under trying circumstances.

We welcome High Commissioner's initiatives in implementing the UNHCR reforms to improve the performance of the organization and enhance its efficiency through cost effective measures, decentralized structure, simplification of procedures and implementation of more transparent and regionalized structure to swiftly address the challenges in the ground.

Mr. Chairman,

It is a great tragedy of our time that that the people are subjected to forced eviction on grounds of their race, religion, belief, ethnicity, culture and conscience. This must end. Never before has the need been so compelling and overwhelming to proceed with renewed resolve and optimism to make a

difference in their lives by ensuring their right to life and return to their country.

We are highly encouraged by the unwavering commitment to protection termed by the High Commissioner as the centre of everything that UNHCR does. This gives hope and future to the hapless and homeless millions uprooted from their homeland. We fully recognize High Commissioner's vision of voluntary repatriation as an effective component of durable solution and support the strategic role of the UNHCR in the return and sustainable reintegration of refugees in their homeland in complete safety with full honor and dignity.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me take this august assembly to the protracted situation of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, which has been dragging on for two decades. Nepal, despite its own pressing commitments on national fronts, has provided shelter to over 107,000 refugees from Bhutan on humanitarian grounds, and done everything to ensure peace, and security in the refugee camps. The prolonged stay of such a large number of refugees has placed enormous social, economic and environmental costs on Nepal.

I regret to inform this distinguished gathering that Nepal's continued and committed efforts to resolve this tragic humanitarian episode through the agreed process of bilateral negotiations have met, much to our disappointment, with the non-implementation of the agreed decisions, non-cooperation, and evasive approach by Bhutan. Refugees in the camps are longing to return to their country of origin as early as possible in complete safety, honor and dignity. But they have been denied their right to return home and be a part of national life.

Amid such a situation, Nepal welcomed the offer of the international community for opening up of the option for voluntary third country resettlement with the understanding that the refugees' inherent right to return to Bhutan remains intact and open. We consider resettlement as an interim solution to this protracted refugee situation and a step forward towards repatriation to their homeland. This should not absolve Bhutan from its responsibility towards its forcibly exiled citizens. It is the legitimate right of all refugees to be able to return to Bhutan in safety and dignity with full restitution of their land and properties. This is the only option of a durable and comprehensive resolution of the problem.

We sincerely appreciate the role played by the core group countries- Australia, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States. Nepal thanks them for their proactive humanitarian initiatives to resettle a large chunk of the Bhutanese refugees. We view this initiative as a worthy example of burden sharing and effort to make difference in the lives of this vulnerable population. My government has been working closely with the UNHCR, IOM and the Core Group Countries and

extending all cooperation in the best possible manner to facilitate the voluntary resettlement process of the refugees.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me express our appreciation for the continued support and humanitarian assistance being provided by the UNHCR for the care and maintenance of the Bhutanese refugees living in various camps in Nepal. I take this opportunity to renew our gratitude to the UNHCR, the WFP, the donor community, the INGOs and NGOs for their continued support and assistance and call upon them to continue with the assistance and support until this problem is honorably resolved.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.