

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MUNIR AKRAM, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF PAKISTAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 104: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Mr. Chairman,

Through you I would like to thank the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for his comprehensive report. Pakistan enjoys a historically close relationship with UNHCR, having initiated the proposal for its permanent establishment almost 50 years ago. We appreciate the support which the Office has extended to Pakistan, especially in coping with the over 3 million Afghan refugees – the largest single case-load of refugees in the world.

2. The High Commissioner has reported a reduction in the number of vulnerable people from 21.1 to 19.8 million in December 2001. This illustrates the magnitude of the challenge and the need to:

- address the root causes of human displacement including armed conflicts, man made and natural disasters;
- allocate adequate resources for the sustenance of refugees and displaced persons, mostly in the poorest countries and their early repatriation; and
- establish legal frameworks to assist millions seeking asylum and resettlement.

3. The High Commissioner's new initiatives, for development through local integration and 'Convention Plus' to address protection challenges, need closer examination by the UNHCR's Standing and Executive Committees. The 'agenda for protection', to be endorsed by the General Assembly, is a blue print for future action. Issues of concern to host countries i.e. durable solutions; voluntary repatriation of refugees; expansion of resettlement quotas; burden sharing through provision of generous humanitarian, financial and technical assistance; capacity building, and alleviation of the negative consequences on host societies of long term refugee presence, must all be addressed as priorities in the follow up to the 'agenda for protection'.

4. For countries which have hosted large caseloads of refugees for extended periods, voluntary refugee repatriation is often the only viable and durable solution. Given their own underdevelopment and narrow employment opportunities, host developing countries should not be expected to accept local integration of large numbers of refugees. Ironically, those who prescribe local integration to developing host countries, mostly represent richer countries with larger capacities for refugee integration and, indeed, a demand for the low-wage manpower which migrants and refugees can provide. Apart from accepting larger numbers of refugees for settlement, these more affluent countries can also play a pivotal role, by promoting durable solutions, enlarging their refugee programmes, and supporting peacemaking and reconstruction in the 'countries of origin'.

5. Refugees can contribute to the economies of host countries but only if the enabling conditions to do so exist in these countries. With few exceptions, developing countries do not offer such prospects. Developing host countries should be given adequate development assistance to create economic and employment opportunities for their own citizens as well as for refugees if their immediate repatriation is not possible. Presently, developing host countries, like Pakistan, are coping with the care and sustenance of millions of refugees from their own limited resources, eroding their ability to look after their own poor people. Refugee concentrations often create serious law and order problems for the host countries and cause significant economic and social damage. If international solidarity for refugees is to be kept active, the considerable

contributions of developing host countries need to be more widely acknowledged, appreciated and supplemented by international action to help them meet the costs and the challenges faced by the influx and presence of large refugee populations.

6. We support the High Commissioner's call for adequate and assured financial support for the UNHCR's programme and budget. The chronic budget shortages confronted by the UNHCR aggravate the suffering of refugees and host countries in many parts of the world. Basic needs and services are often unmet as a result of funding shortfalls. Thousands face starvation and suffering as a result. Pakistan has suggested that the UNHCR should adopt a new budget format for developing countries with allocation of special and separate budgets for refugee populations. This should be prepared in close consultations with the host countries. We urge donor countries to be more predictable and generous in their financial assistance to host countries.

Mr. Chairman,

7. Pakistan has hosted 3 million Afghan refugees for over two decades. The Afghan refugee population reached its peak – 3.7 million – in 1990. Unfortunately, international assistance to these refugees declined rapidly after this date once the Cold War ended. In 2001, the UNHCR allocated only 24 million dollars for 2.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan i.e. a little over 10 dollars annually for each refugee.

8. The contributions made by Pakistan towards the care and protection of the Afghan refugees need to be acknowledged and treated at par with the contributions from donor countries. The impact of the Afghan refugee presence on Pakistan has been multi-dimensional i.e. demographic, economic, financial, ecological and social. Pakistan's hope that the international community would share this burden equitably has remained unfulfilled.

9. The prolonged civil war in Afghanistan, the prolonged drought which affected Afghanistan for several years and, later, the “war against terrorism” in Afghanistan, all contributed to creating new refugee influxes into Pakistan during the past few years. However, during the last year, there has been, finally, a sizeable outflow of Afghan refugees back to their home land. Over 1.5 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country. But another 2 million remain to be repatriated. Most of the remaining refugees have lived in camps for two decades – an entire generation, born and raised in refugee camps. To encourage their repatriation, the international community must accelerate its efforts for rehabilitation and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Basic elements, such as security, food security and employment-generation, are essential pre-requisites to accomplish the gigantic task of repatriating and rehabilitating the Afghan refugees. The international community must deliver on the pledges made in Tokyo to help Afghanistan re-build and revive.

10. Peace, stability and economic rehabilitation in Afghanistan are collective obligations of all the members of the international community. We urge the international community not to relent in its support to Afghanistan during the current critical phase of transition. Pakistan has committed its fullest support to President Hamid Karzai. We pledged a 100 million dollars in support and have already delivered over 10 million dollars of this assistance. We have concluded several agreements with the Afghan Government to accelerate reconstruction. Numerous high level visits between the two countries have laid a solid foundation for future cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

11. Throughout history, the largest human displacements have been caused by wars and conflicts. Wars, it is said, are made in the minds of men (and women); they can be stopped if a significant commitment and sincere efforts are deployed to address the underlying causes of such conflicts. The United Nations, and its family of organizations, can and must play a critical role in promoting such efforts at conflict-resolution and peace-making, as envisaged in Chapter-VI of the UN Charter. Simultaneously, the international system must acquire the institutional and financial capacity to ameliorate the human suffering and despair caused by wars and conflicts as well as

natural calamities. We trust that the UNHCR will continue to constitute a critical element of this international capacity for humanitarianism and provide the avenue to help those millions of peoples who are disrupted and in despair – the vulnerable of the world. Pakistan hopes that the "UNHCR 2004" process will lead to the emergence of an organization with a prominent role in the implementation of this emerging global agenda.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.