



INTERVENTION BY

H.E. AMBASSADOR AYOOB ERFANI

AT THE 984TH PERMANENT COUNCIL MEETING

OF THE

ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION

IN EUROPE (OSCE)

IN RESPONSE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

H.E. ANTÓNIO GUTERRES

20 FEBRUARY 2014

Hofburg, Vienna

Intervention BY H.E. AMBASSADOR AYOOB ERFANI at the 984th Permanent Council Meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in response to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, H.E. António Guterres

Mr Chairperson,

H.E. Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Swiss Chairmanship for inviting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to today's meeting.

Mr. High Commissioner, António Guterres!

It is a real pleasure for my delegation to warmly welcome you here to today's PC meeting and we thank you for your comprehensive presentation, including your comments on my country, Afghanistan. Through you, Mr High Commissioner, I would like to express our gratitude to UNHCR's staff for their continued efforts in co-ordinating regional and international support to assist Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are the victims of three decades of imposed conflict in Afghanistan.

UNHCR is a prominent and well respected UN agency serving the Afghan people and has been a long time partner with Afghanistan. This partnership dates back many years prior to 2001 and we are sure this close relationship, as partners, shall exist for many years after 2014. We highly value the work of UNHCR and strongly support its co-ordinating humanitarian role.

Mr. Chairman,

Since 2001, the Government of Afghanistan together with UNHCR's programmes has assisted close to 5.8 million Afghan refugees to voluntarily repatriate back home, which is the largest voluntary repatriation in history. Unfortunately, approximately 40% of returnees, due to the fragile security situation, limited opportunities for decent

work and access to basic services, have not been reintegrated into society. This historic voluntary return of more than 5.8 million Afghans in less than a decade to a country which has undergone thirty years of war and destruction, has posed a challenge for Afghanistan's absorption capacity and the Government has faced difficulties in adopting the necessary reintegration measures. In addition, the ongoing security, economic and political transition in the country, coupled with the considerable psychological impact of the drawdown of international forces in 2014, resulted in the reduced number of refugees returning to Afghanistan during recent years.

Afghanistan still remains the leading country of origin for refugees, especially in our neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan. Addressing the reintegration of refugees and IDPs continues to be a serious humanitarian, economic and security issue for Afghanistan and we are determined to do our part to create conditions conducive to the safe, secure and voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees and IDPs, as a main element of our National Priority Programs (NPPs) in the coming Decade of Transformation.

I would like to join H.E. the High Commissioner in his request to the international community for continued support of Afghanistan, and to find a sustainable solution for voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees to the country, through all suitable bilateral, trilateral, regional and international mechanisms, including through the implementation of the UNHCR's Solution Strategy which has been endorsed in Geneva by some 50 countries in May 2012. In Afghanistan, we have taken practical measures for the implementation of this strategy and to this end we need the adequate resources to move from humanitarian assistance to develop projects, build absorption capacities, create conditions conducive to fully integrate refugees and IDPs, and strengthen the Afghan ownership based on lessons learned.

Your continued support for the voluntary, dignified, secure and sustainable return of Afghanistan's refugees is vital for a successful Transition and the Decade of Transformation, and remains essential for the stability of Afghanistan and our region.

In conclusion, I would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to all countries present here, our neighbors and friends in and beyond the OSCE region, for the generous and continued support towards stabilization and development in

Afghanistan, and for hosting Afghan refugees, who had to leave Afghanistan for a safer and better future, and for facilitating their reintegration.

I wish you Mr. High Commissioner and your dedicated staff around the world every success for your difficult and noble tasks.

Thank you