



Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan
(Tokyo, 8 July 2012)

Statement by Mr. T. Alexander Aleinikoff
Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman:

In his remarks this morning, the Secretary General stated that we "must not forget Afghan refugees". Decades of conflict have created millions of refugees. As Mrs. Ogata noted, over the past decade 5.7 million refugees have returned home. But nearly 3 million Afghans remain outside their country, registered as refugees; most reside in Pakistan and Iran, who have hosted the Afghan refugees for more than 30 years. It is now time to help refugees who seek to return home to do so.

In May of this year, UNHCR along with the Government of Switzerland hosted an international conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. The strategy is a joint product of an unprecedented quadripartite consultative process involving the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, supported by UNHCR. The strategy comprehensively addresses the requirements of voluntary repatriation, reintegration, capacity building, and assistance to host countries.

Successful and sustainable return requires that refugees return to communities, jobs, access to social services and education, and security. Thus an important part of the strategy is a joint program of UNHCR and UNDP, along with other UN organizations, which links to the Afghan National Development Strategy and builds on Afghanistan's National Priority Programs framework. The program has identified 48 communities in high return areas for targeted development assistance, both for repatriating refugees and the local population.

Our work would not have been possible without the strong support of the international community. And I would like to make special mention of the generous support of our hosts today, the Government of Japan. Since 2002, Japan has provided 241 million US dollars for Afghan refugees. I would also like to express appreciation to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for their generous hospitality and recognize the burden they have carried for so many years in hosting millions of Afghan refugees.

Afghanistan's Decade of Transformation will be primarily achieved through the efforts of the Afghan people. Returning refugees, who will be rejoining their fellow citizens, have much to contribute to that process of transformation. We must help them get home and must ensure their successful reintegration so that they can play their roles in the construction of the future of their country.

Thank you.