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UNHCR Opening Statement

**Mr Neill Wright, Regional Representative for
Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific**

**10th Plenary Meeting of the Inter-Governmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on
Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants (APC)**

Shanghai, 24 October 2005

Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres and the UNHCR Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Janet Lim, I wish to thank the Government of China for hosting and facilitating this APC Plenary Meeting here in Shanghai. I am honoured to have been invited to provide the UNHCR opening address.

My name is Neill Wright, and in addition to being the UNHCR regional focal point for the APC Process, I am the UNHCR Regional Representative for Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific.

It has certainly been a busy year for the international community, and the timing of this Plenary Meeting could not be better, taking place as it does so soon after the UN Summit, UNHCR's annual Executive Committee meeting, and the recent report of the Global Commission on International Migration.

UNHCR has welcomed the positive outcomes of the UN Summit – amongst others the new commitments to combat terrorism and to seek to prevent widespread abuses of human rights and genocide such as took place in Rwanda in 1994; the restated commitment of UN member states to the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals – especially to poverty reduction and reducing the spread of HIV and AIDS; the prospects for a UN Peacebuilding Commission and a standing Human Rights Council; the strengthening of the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and the determination to pursue UN management reforms.

The Summit demonstrated the important fact that no one State, no matter how powerful, can deal with these challenges alone. It showed that the United Nations is still needed and supported – needed as an organisation that contributes to respect for principled international norms and standards, established in cooperation with its member states; and as one that provides states with peer-review mechanisms in promoting greater security, freedom and prosperity for the world's people.

Sovereign integrity and effective social welfare systems are all parts of your personal security as citizens of your separate countries, but real security on the territory of one nation state is impossible without contributing to more effective regional and international security systems, or without addressing the root causes of population displacement.

The 56th Session of the UNHCR EXCOM was notable for reaffirming member state commitment to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol being the cornerstone of the international refugee protection regime, as agreed in UNHCR's "note on international protection"; for its support for UNHCR's "strengthening protection capacity project"; for the intent to better use targeted development to both more effectively address the root causes of population displacement and to create environments more suitable for solutions to displacement; for the consensus achieved in its EXCOM Conclusions on challenges facing States in today's world, such as local integration and complementary protection; and for the mainstreaming of UNHCR's Convention Plus initiative in a way that will improve how we collectively address and resolve refugee problems in the modern era.

As a result of the UN system's efforts to improve its humanitarian emergency response mechanisms through providing greater predictability and coordination, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee has also recently agreed upon responsibilities for addressing the needs of persons internally displaced within their own country, where a host nation requests such support. As part of this collaborative approach, UNHCR will in future provide the UN agency "cluster lead" coordination for protection, camp management and emergency shelter for IDPs, except for those displaced by natural disasters, where IOM and the IFRC are considering taking the "cluster lead" role. Although it is still too early to assess the extent or budgetary cost of these expanded responsibilities for UNHCR, especially as the responsibilities include being the "provider of last resort", pilot projects will be carried out in the next year in three existing IDP situations, one of which is, I understand, likely to be in this region, in Nepal. Analysis of these should help to clarify the additional costs, how much of them can be borne by the strengthened UN Central Emergency Relief Fund, and how much from UNHCR's own budget.

The report of the Global Commission for International Migration to the UN Secretary General in early October implied very clearly that migration will require more and more attention from the international community in the years ahead. Along with the UN Summit and UNHCR's EXCOM, it affirmed once again the link between solutions to people's need for security, with respect of their basic rights, with investment in preventing instability, with population displacement, and with how best to cope with migration challenges. Each also stressed the importance of regional cooperation in the joint efforts to implement what has been agreed.

International refugee protection increasingly takes place against a complex backdrop of mixed population flows, security interests and dwindling resources. Capacity building and burden-sharing in this area are therefore all the more important.

Despite these positive developments, we must not underestimate the challenges ahead. The commitment to increase overseas development aid to 0.5% of GDP by 2010 and to 0.7% of GDP by 2015, and the many reforms agreed upon, should have an impact in reducing root causes, but they are all phased over many years, and will require member states, regional cooperation processes such as the APC, Bali Process and PIDC, and international institutions to make determined efforts for these commitments and strategies to become a reality. In the interim, and as part of the strategy, UNHCR will continue to strengthen its partnerships, including those with the EU, the European Council, the Inter-Governmental Consultations, and with regional process in Africa and in the Asia-Pacific area. An active and invigorated APC is thus essential to UNHCR's cooperation with and technical support for the APC member states.

In early July, in Beijing, the Government of China as the APC Secretariat and UNHCR hosted a workshop on "regional capacity-building for durable solutions". I take this opportunity to commend the Co-Chairs report from that workshop to you, for its insights into increased multilateral cooperation and information-sharing between countries in this region. UNHCR very much looks forward to a fruitful discussion on that workshop in this Plenary Meeting, under the scheduled agenda item.

This is, then, a time of opportunity; a time to build upon all these initiatives. UNHCR has five decades of experience in supporting states in the provision of international refugee protection and in addressing statelessness wherever it is found. Thanks to the confidence states have in UNHCR, its emergency response capacity is being further increased. UNHCR continues to work closely with states, in this region and others, to ensure support to those persons of its mandated concern, bringing to bear the expertise and tools it has to offer in refugee status determination, repatriation of refugees, resettlement of refugees, integration of refugees, and targeting of development assistance for refugees. Refugees are amongst the world's most vulnerable individuals. Refugee women and children, and elderly refugees, have special needs that UNHCR is developing additional tools for under its current age and gender diversity mainstreaming programmes, to assist states in giving appropriate attention to protection and support to those within refugee caseloads who are in the greatest need.

UNHCR also remains fully committed to its role in support of the Inter-Governmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants, and hopes to see an active work plan developed by the APC member states for 2006 and beyond. Such a Plan could include expert consultations, and to seek to enrich the APC network through greater dialogue with civil society, NGOs and academics. The member states here at this Plenary may wish to consider some themes for the proposed expert consultations, such as i) *tackling the asylum-migration nexus*, ii) *building/enhancing national protection capacities*, and iii) *identifying and implementing durable solutions*.

Let me close by once again thanking our hosts at this APC Plenary Meeting, not only for their generous hospitality, but also for their important work as the APC Secretariat in 2005.

Thank you for your attention.
