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### **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal**

The European Union, as a major development partner of both Bhutan and Nepal and as the largest funding source for the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal, has been encouraged by the fact that the parties after many years of negotiations have reached agreement on verification of the first 12,000 people in the Khudunabari Camp.

However, the EU shares concerns expressed over procedures and results of the verification process, according to which the legal standing, including citizenship rights, of 70.5% of the refugees classified as having left Bhutan voluntarily is uncertain. The EU is also concerned over the lack of adequate appeals procedures.

The EU calls on both parties to initiate repatriation and integration of the refugees as soon as possible and in full compliance with international law and human rights. The EU believes that it is especially important that parties involve the UNHCR or any other equally experienced international organisation as independent and impartial advisor and monitor in the process so that an appropriate treatment of all remaining verification cases and of all appeals can be ensured.

In order to facilitate the process, the parties are urged to prepare, and make transparent, plans for repatriation/reintegration, addressing inter alia the questions of citizenship, housing, agricultural land and repatriation grants, covering both those refugees who wish to return to Bhutan and those who wish to stay in Nepal. As earlier indicated the EU is prepared to provide adequate financial assistance related to the reintegration and resettlement of the refugees.

Finally, the EU reiterates that respect for international law and human rights is one of the fundamental pillars of cooperation between the EU and both Nepal and Bhutan, as it is for all of the EU's development partners.

The Acceding Countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, the Associated Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.

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