

A woman in traditional yellow and colorful attire is shown in profile, focused on weaving a basket. She wears a vibrant headscarf with green, blue, and red patterns. Her yellow top features intricate brown and red designs and the word 'Budor' written in white script. She has a white feather earring. The background shows a large tree trunk and a glimpse of a bright outdoor setting.

WOMEN LEADING FOR LIVELIHOODS

*Worlds of Women
Coming Together*

Report on meeting with the
Corporate Networking Group of
Women's International Networking (WIN)

6 February 2009
UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva



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A cosmopolitan mix of women from the corporate and humanitarian fields gathered to discuss the empowerment of displaced women through livelihoods. More than 30 people from around the world attended the half-day "Worlds of Women Coming Together" meeting, co-organized by the UNHCR and Women's International Networking (WIN).

Summary

Pascale Moreau, Deputy Director, UNHCR Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, welcomed the group. She emphasized that women were not just victims and recipients of aid, but with the right resources, contributed to the growth and sustainability of society. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary of the World YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), pointed out in her keynote address that beyond income and food,

livelihoods are about rebuilding dignity, giving women protection, an income and eventually voice and agency. UNHCR Public Affairs Officer Safak Pavey spoke on "Empowerment of refugee women with disabilities" and reminded participants that some women are triply marginalized by status, disability and gender. Lastly, UNHCR Senior Livelihoods Officer, Gaëla Roudy Fraser, discussed "Building women's livelihoods with WLL projects," and presented a fair-trade enterprise project, one of 30 initiatives promoted by the Women Leading for Livelihoods (WLL) programme. Also of note were the remarks of George Okoth-Obbo, UNHCR Director for International Protection Services, who brought in the issues of scale as a key aspect. Marie O'Hara, WIN Manager of Partner Relations and Communications, gave a reminder of what women do at the frontline. UNHCR Technical Officer on sexual and gender-based violence Joanina Karugaba introduced a film on female genital mutilation (FGM) to commemorate the International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation which is 6 February.



Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary of World YWCA, gives the keynote address at the "Worlds of Women Coming Together" event in Geneva. To her left is Gry Tina Tinde, Special Advisor, WLL. © UNHCR/S.Hopper

Opening Remarks

Marie O'Hara, WIN Manager of Partner Relations and Communications, welcomed the guests and gave a brief introduction of WIN as an internationally recognized platform engaging thousands of women and an increasing number of men. WIN's goal is to evoke change and authenticity and to raise feminine and global awareness to create a sustainable future. WIN seeks to inspire success based on individuality rather than the stereotypical, cultivate authentic leadership and encourage feminine ways of doing business. She underlined the importance of cooperative events such as this and connecting and empowering women worldwide. She expressed her gratitude to Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda of YWCA and participants.

What is WLL?

Moreau said that UNHCR has a limited budget, about 1.1 billion US\$, and many competing demands. Life-saving assistance must come first. The agency has 33 million persons of concern and works in 110 countries. Although 84 field operations are delivering projects to support refugee livelihoods, financial and human resources are simply too scarce to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship, paid work and vocational training for all. Often refugees face practical and legal obstacles to their human right to work as well.

She pointed out that through the private donations to WLL UNHCR is enhancing refugee women's possibility to become self-reliant and live in dignity and safety. It was clear that livelihoods help refugees find lasting solutions, whether they are asylum seekers, have returned to their country, integrated locally, or resettled to a third country.

She noted that to date UNHCR, partners and refugee women have created 29 livelihoods projects in a dozen countries with large refugee populations. Projects are diverse, covering innovative

Introduction

Deputy Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Pascale Moreau, stressed the agency's commitment to empowering displaced women through its Women Leading for Livelihoods (WLL) programme, set up two years ago. She pointed out that WLL was a fund-raising and awareness tool that enables UNHCR offices, partners and refugee women to plan and execute livelihood projects that otherwise might not have seen the light of day. Refugee women face a series of barriers to work: legal restrictions, physical and psychological trauma, lack of financial resources, child care issues, the wrong skills set for the environment and much more. WLL aims to try and break down these barriers through the funding of a full range of programs aimed at empowering refugee women.

farming, computer training, small business set-ups, sewing workshops and more.

Moreau spoke about the six WLL projects set up through the support of Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein of Jordan and private donors in Japan (Soroptimists) and Australia. Funding from private donors is confirmed for an additional three projects, bringing the donations to date to US\$ 630,000. Four or five projects have received pledges and the rest are still seeking funding. WLL project budgets range from US\$ 20,000 to 150,000. All donations go straight to the projects, except for 10 percent for WLL awareness activities.

WLL endeavours to change how to work with women of concern by focusing on self-reliance as opposed to continuing the more usual 'care and maintenance' that can last for years and decades.

Cover:
SUDAN, woman weaving



What makes WLL different from other programs empowering women?

Moreau emphasised that WLL uses established livelihood principles and is as such not different from what other organisations do to ensure women's economic empowerment and sustainability of projects.

WLL is unique because:

- With WLL the UN Refugee Agency systematically builds its own and refugee women's livelihood capacity around the world;
- For the first time in its nearly 60-year history, UNHCR invites influential women in the private sector to join in finding and funding lasting solutions for refugee and internally displaced women;
- WLL includes Diaspora women in its policy planning and events;
- A key aim of WLL is to move refugee women's informal economic activities, which are often dangerous, out from the shade and into the open, safe and regulated work life.

Moreau pointed out that WLL networks engaged women in organisations that UNHCR traditionally had not linked up with, such as the International Trade Centre (ITC), the World Trade Organisation and the International Finance Corporation. Joint activities supporting refugee women's livelihoods are currently being considered under the theme fair trade. One example of this was the social entrepreneurship project in Bangladesh recently visited by Gaëla Roudy Fraser.

Moreau said that WLL was happy to network with all the parties present. There was much to learn from corporate and entrepreneurial people who are better informed on how to develop a business model, do market analysis, adapt product designs to market trends and needs, ensure sales, exports, public relations and a healthy bottom line. For refugee women who are entrepreneurial or who simply need a job to feed themselves and their families a business or job opportunity is crucial.

Keynote Address

Keynote speaker **Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda**, General Secretary of the World YWCA, shared her personal experience as a native of Zimbabwe who was born and grew up with displacement and exclusion. She spent her teenage years in a rural setting and moved to the city at the age of 18. Gumbonzvanda said her country was once more in crisis "and again my family and many women are displaced."

She noted that her sense of livelihood was profound because it drew both on her personal and professional experiences. Gumbonzvanda has ten years of professional United Nations experience in conflict-affected countries. She served as Regional Director for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Eastern Africa; as Human Rights Officer with UNICEF in Liberia, and as National Child Advisor. When visiting camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in places like Sudan's Darfur region and other conflict-torn areas, she saw, heard and felt the suffering of the women.

Gumbonzvanda gave three core messages:

1) Protection: Women refugees need to be protected from abuse, rape, violence, and abduction. This was the first priority for displaced women who were refugees or in crisis.

2) Livelihoods: "It is so dehumanizing to live in a camp for displaced people for more than 20 years and wait for a handout to send your kids to school, to look for medicine, to look for food." Gumbonzvanda noted that the essence of being able to generate something in your own small way, to care, to nurture, is a profound human need. She said she echoed an unanimous cry by the IDP women from Darfur during the recent 'Second Sudanese Women's Forum on Darfur' organised by Femmes Africa Solidarite, in January 2009.



Participants at the "Worlds of Women Coming Together" event in Geneva. © UNHCR/S.Hopper

3) Voice and agency: Displaced women need to have a space to share and livelihoods projects give them this significant opportunity. Gumbonzvanda gave examples of women gathering together to knit and sew while at the same time sharing their experiences and traumas.

Gumbonzvanda gave a brief history of the YWCA and its thematic connection to WLL. The YWCA was born in 1855 during the industrial revolution in Great Britain. The World YWCA is a global network of women leading social and economic change in 125 countries worldwide. It advocates for peace, justice, health, human dignity, freedom and care of the environment, and has been at the forefront of raising the status of women since it was founded in 1855. Today, the YWCA movement empowers women and girls to change their world for good in 22,775 local communities of 125 countries.

The overall goals include:

- to achieve cultural, economic, political, religious and social justice for all women and girls;
- to develop and sustain women's leadership, to promote women as decision makers; and
- to increase the effectiveness of the World YWCA as a global women's movement with an informed and active membership at local, national and international levels.

The priority areas include:

- Women's Health and HIV/AIDS;
- Human rights of women and children;
- World peace with justice; and
- Sustainable development (including

women's economic justice and the environment).

She raised the question: Why should we support livelihoods programs?

1) At the international level she pointed out that there are 'baskets full of norms, policies and instruments, charters, protocols, organizational policies'. However, the question is how do we translate these into action that improves the everyday life of women in the local community? How are we channelling our budgets to redress the circumstances? What is the budget of UNHCR for instance, for women's vocational training and livelihoods? It is essential to provide financial resources to deliver action. Does corporate social responsibility focus on women's livelihoods? It is only by investing in the displaced women that we are able to rebuild livelihoods and restore dignity.

2) Gumbonzvanda asked if UNHCR employees at the front line require trauma counselling as a result of what they witness during the course of their work. With this in mind, she raised the question, "How about those women who have spent over 30 years in camps or slums surrounded by these traumas day in and day out? For example, camps like Gulu (Uganda), Darfur, (Sudan) and slums in Cape Town (South Africa)?" Livelihoods and humanitarian support are critical for holding body and soul together. She underscored the hardship of a woman waking up and waiting for the routine at the camps, pondering about the desolate political situation and an uncertain future.

The importance of livelihoods programs

Gumbonzvanda stated that WLL projects can do a number of things:

- 1) Create alternative spaces where women can come together and overcome the feeling of hopelessness;
- 2) Provide platforms for informal counseling with important therapeutic benefits. Traumatic experiences and accumulated stress and deprivation can be discussed with peers.
- 3) Develop entrepreneurial skills for self-reliance, hone the ability to plan and increase the understanding of one's own skills and knowledge;
- 4) The actual result: The income, benefits to the family and community, being able to support herself thus being self-reliant. With less time spent looking for food and water or being sick from dangerous, unhealthy work, refugee and internally displaced women can give much needed leadership to peacebuilding activities in their community.

Gumbonzvanda pointed out that **individuals** can contribute to livelihood programmes by giving their time and connecting at a profound level by thinking and caring about refugees, IDP's and people in conflict; contributing one's skills to livelihood projects and sharing livelihood projects with others who may be able to make a donation.

Those in **corporate organizations** or with access to them can raise awareness and funds by:

- 1) Influencing policies within their organizations and communities, by giving sufficient guidance and ensuring it is followed by concrete action;
- 2) Contributing to and adopting livelihoods projects either through philanthropic resources or recommending to others to support projects;
- 3) Supporting UNHCR's work in camps and urban settings by going on a WLL visit, donating funds and giving a smile and dignity to the women and children.

Gumbonzvanda concluded by saying that no effort is too small. It is through partnership that we are who we are. She re-assured the audience that YWCA will collaborate more closely with WIN, UNHCR-WLL and other women's programs to bring about change.

Julie Ochienghs from Uganda, Femmes Africa Solidarite staffer and WLL rapporteur, shared her experience of being a refugee as a young girl. She noted that the system of distribution of humanitarian assistance did not seem to have evolved much since the time when she was a refugee in Kenya some 25 years ago. Only last year she saw how refugees from Kenya to her home town, 'Tororo - Mulanda and Malaba' in Uganda had to fight their way to get food and items off trucks. The living conditions of the refugees were very harsh. There seemed to be little attention to addressing needs of the most vulnerable. She called on participants to engage in partnerships such as WLL. She also pointed out that individual contributions in terms of rendering professional skills and giving a listening ear were of great significance.

Contributions to the Discussions

George Okoth-Obbo, UNHCR Director for International Protection Services, appreciated the connection made between livelihoods and protection. He said it was critical to look at the enormity of the need and the structural composi-



UNHCR Public Affairs Officer, Safak Pavey (left), and UNHCR Director of International Protection Services, George Okoth-Obbo, spoke at the "Worlds of Women Coming Together" event in Geneva. © UNHCR/S.Hopper

tion of people, giving an example of the Daadab camp program in Kenya in 1993. In one night alone nearly 300 Somali women were raped. These were the reported cases; the number could be higher. Over 80 percent of these cases occurred as a result of women collecting firewood. These instances, he said, should lead us to reconstruct and redesign the management of entire programmes to address the emerging issues and challenges.

Okoth-Obbo reflected on his experience of the ongoing Zimbabwe situation. He said it was disheartening to see a file of children between the ages of 5 to 15 without adults. He pointed out that attacks took place at riverbeds while women went to fetch water. He stressed that there should be immediate attention to risk areas. An important aspect of assistance is for instance the school enrolment of children and youth.

Gumbonzvanda stressed the importance of the relationship between the private sector and humanitarian sectors. She gave an example of the relations between the private sector and the UN in the fight against terrorism, giving an example of Motorola investing heavily in security systems and gadgets. Women have bled enough, she said. Books have been written on violence against women while the private sector has invested too little in alternative energy that could eliminate the risk that women continue to face when collecting firewood.

She advocated for collaboration between the private and humanitarian sectors to exploit solar energy for public and

private use. In Sudan where there is abundant sunshine solar energy could bring about enormous change. The issue of firewood should also be a topic of concern in the global climate change discussions.

In terms of technology, she spoke of how the mobile telephone had revolutionized communication in Somalia. Humanitarian issues must move out of the confines of the humanitarian sector and substantively into the private sector, she reiterated. She also suggested a system-wide approach: How do we bring the issue of livelihoods into the wider UN family to ensure commitments are made?

Gumbonzvanda stated that it was important to take cognizance of the work that is already happening and to strengthen community-based networks. It was significant to create more strategic relationships particularly for women's networks to scale up their own work. The current programming is still fragmented and sectoralized and there is a need to see how to deal with crosscutting issues: For instance gender mainstreaming should be at the core, not at the margin. She noted that a lot of energy was channelled to advocacy to put issues on the table and yet more time could be spent on delivery.

In conclusion she highlighted the vulnerability of young people and the importance of linking livelihoods with sports, giving an example of Peru and Mathari boys in Kenya. She said the issue of education should be central at all times.

Empowerment of refugee women with disabilities

Safak Pavey, UNHCR Public Affairs Officer, said refugee women with disabilities are left 'invisible' in various stages of displacement, also in terms of livelihoods opportunities.

She began with a quote: "the commitments made by governments in Beijing reflect the understanding that women's equality must be a

central component of any attempt to solve the world's social, economic and political problems. Thus, where once women fought to put gender equality on the international agenda, gender equality is now one of the primary factors shaping that agenda."

Talking of the scope, Pavey cited the World Bank which estimates that at

least 10 percent, 650 million+, of the world's population live with disabilities; there are a minimum of 300 million women with disabilities worldwide, 240 million living in developing countries. Women with disabilities face multiple discrimination.

Pavey stated that they are more exposed to sexual violence, domestic abuse and physical assault. She shared an example of meeting with a young Afghan refugee woman in Iran who had been born without limbs and used as a sexual object over many years. Women, she said, were primary caregivers and those who were disabled faced increased workloads, isolation, discrimination and abuse. Mothers were often blamed for their child's disability.

Turning to the issue of displacement and women with disabilities, she noted that each displaced person brings with her/him a minimum of five more people who are affected by the disability as part of circles of caring and being cared for; with a majority of the displaced persons with disabilities being women, the number of affected persons doubles.

She noted the following: The ratio of disabled to able-bodied is 1/10; however this greatly increases in situations of civil conflict or natural disasters to up to 1/5. During wars, disabilities are caused by various civilian-targeted violent practices such as cluster bombs, landmines, rockets. Usually there are no skills training or employment opportunities for women with disabilities; they face multiple discrimination and gaps in access to health care systems, schooling, vocational training, social support systems, skills training, career advancement, employment and retention opportunities. In most cultures they are seen as a shame and a sin.

On the issue of the right to life, disabled people often cannot survive when it is necessary to run for your life. Women with disabilities or women with children, family members or husbands with disabilities face double restraints; they are often left behind because they are seen as a burden obstructing others' flight. At

times they are locked away so that they cannot run away and are often exposed to physical and sexual abuse during flight.

"Once displaced, a refugee woman with disability faces double vulnerability; she is often the last to receive food, water and care and, in many situations is viewed as a burden to be left behind," said Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees. They continue to remain hidden, something to be ashamed of, literally invisible in a refugee situation. There was usually no information about the rights or the available services for persons with disabilities in the refugee host countries and no opportunities for livelihood.

Pavey recognised the achievement of the UNHCR initiative towards disabled persons, noting the a) UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; b) Global change from medical to social and inclusive human rights perspective c) new UNHCR Policies - both human resources as well as operational, and d) inclusion of persons with disabilities in WLL projects with specific focus on empowerment and integration of refugee women with disabilities.

Pavey asked: What can we do as donors and/or as individuals?

- 1) Make sure the livelihood projects we financially support include women with disabilities both as experts and beneficiaries;
- 2) Always ask ourselves whether there is a disabled woman/speaker/participant amongst us at a platform/think-tank or a donor meeting that we organize or attend as well as any topic on disabilities included?
- 3) As today's and future employers, we can always consider qualified disabled refugee woman as candidates, giving them equal employment opportunities;
- 4) As individuals, we can always contribute to disabled women's skill development and career advancement, sharing our time, energy, knowledge & skills;

Pavey concluded her presentation by citing examples of Women celebrities who

- were disabled and are an inspiration to all:
1. Helen Keller - Author, woman and disability rights activist and lecturer- deaf and blind
 2. Agatha Christie -writer, dyslexic
 3. Bonnie St. John Deane - CEO, author, Olympic skier, the president of SJD&Co, a Harvard lecturer, amputee & wheelchair user.

Gumbonzvanda said she would request an inclusion of this issue in the international women's colloquium in Liberia to be held in March 2009.

Building women's livelihoods with WLL projects

Gaëla Roudy Fraser, UNHCR Senior Livelihoods Officer, outlined the multi-year livelihood strategy of UNHCR and the planned WLL social entrepreneurship project in Bangladesh. Just back from a mission to Cox' Bazaar, Roudy Fraser said that in Bangladesh refugees are faced with many obstacles to the right to work. The government used to be very restrictive on refugees' right to work. As in many other parts of the world, refugees and particularly women are very exposed to economic exploitation as they struggle to raise a meagre income when access to work is limited. They tend to get paid less than local people do for the same work, because they are not in a position to negotiate.

She pointed out that the government is now relaxing on issues and space is opening up to create more programming to support decent livelihoods. UNHCR is presently defining a three-year strategy to support livelihoods with current and new partners. One of the recommendations was to encourage the private sector to come in. She said the Rohingya refugees, a Muslim minority from Myanmar, are oppressed wherever they go. Culturally, she said, women were confined to the house

and viewed negatively if they wished to seek an income outside the home. She stressed that the project in Bangladesh aimed to help people acknowledge that refugees, and particularly women, are a real resource for the economic development of a country.

Roudy Fraser elaborated on the WLL fair trade enterprise project in Bangladesh which follows the 10 standards below:

- 1) Creating opportunities for the economically disadvantaged producers as a strategy for poverty alleviation and sustainable development;
- 2) Timely payment of wages that are higher than the national minimum;
- 3) The implementing partner, HBPS, does not employ any person below the age of 16;
- 4) Gender equality and the empowerment of women in the organization;
- 5) Capacity building of artisans and an enabling environment in which good work and skills are rewarded;
- 6) Transparency and accountability en-



A social entrepreneurship production centre in Bangladesh such as this starts training and employing refugee women in early 2009. © Hathay Bunano

sured;

- 7) HBPS works to create a safe and healthy working environment for producers and in addition is working towards SA8000 certification for rural production centres;
- 8) HBPS actively encourages better environmental practices and the application of responsible methods of production;
- 9) Promoting Fair Trade;
- 10) HBPS trade has concern for the social, economic and environmental well being of marginalized artisans and maintains long-term relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Roudy-Fraser shared details on 15 planned production centres in Cox' Bazaar villages that are seeking funding. The centres are to be built around the camps to create employment for local refugee women both in the camps and in the villages; they also actively promote the inclusion of women with disabilities as long as they can make their way to the centre. She said that she went to one of the enterprises and saw that childcare was provided for the children and that this project was a great way to reach out to the poor and create good working wages for them.

She noted that it was the first time that UNHCR had a direct connection with a social enterprise. Currently the project is seeking to

raise 150,000 USD to establish production centres in refugee hosting-areas and create up to 1,500 jobs for local communities. The production was of good quality with attractive designs sellable in the international market.

Beautiful knitted and crocheted HBPS products were shown to participants. By producing such high-quality toys and clothes refugee women would achieve sustainable livelihoods. In conclusion she pointed out that the enterprise started four years ago and is selling products nationally and internationally, also via the internet.



An example of crocheted toys to be made by refugee women at 15 production centres in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh. © Hathay Bunano

Conclusion

To commemorate the International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) a film by !Respect! was screened on the topic.

Joanina Karugaba, UNHCR Technical Officer, sexual and gender-based violence introduced the short film about a couple who take their daughter for female genital mutilation. After listening to radio messages and songs advocating against the practice, they change their mind. Karugaba mentioned how the unhygienic setting shown in the film was one of the many problems related to FGM, while stressing that medical procedures were not the solution; this makes it even worse. The FGM problem should be eliminated in totality, she concluded.

Participants

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary World YWCA, Kristin Roaldseth Moyer, YWCA, Carolyn Lutz - Lutz Partners, Brigitte Preuss - Alcoa, Vivienne Talbot - Alcoa, Enrica Tomasina - HP, Elise Strigini - Lloydsbank, Lina Zoumut - Lloydsbank, Carla Campbell, Lloydsbank, Beatrice Choisy, GE Money, Ricardo Sabala - Caterpillar, Bianca Thérèse Guarino, STMicroelectronics Foundation, Barbara Boyle-Saidi - ICRC, Medina Haeri - ICRC, Githa Roelans - ILO, Patricia Nabeto - IMAS MRI, Executive Search, Mirella de Boer, c 2 You, Sophie Sobocinski - student, Hannah Sobocinski - student, Tereza Horejsova, Isabella Ries, Julie Ochienghs, Femmes Africa Solidarite, Beatrice Kizi Nzovu, Femmes

Africa Solidarité, WIN : Marie O'Hara, Anna Persson, Mariana Prado UNHCR: George Okoth-Obbo, Lloyd Dakin, Saber Azam, Line Pedersen, Naoko Obi, Lusía Cremonese, Caroline Aasheim, Ignazio Matteini, Suzanne Tremblay, Leo Dobbs, Suzanne Hopper, Claudia Gisiger-Gonzales,

Participants at the "Worlds of Women Coming Together" event in Geneva. © UNHCR/S.Hopper

Jane Rasmussen, Gry Tina Tinde, Gaëla Roudy Fraser, Pascale Moreau, Safak Pavey, Joanina Karugaba, Paulina Valencia.

Websites

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

www.unhcr.org

Women Leading for Livelihoods

www.unhcr.org/wll

Women's International Networking

www.winconference.net

World Young Women's Christian Association

www.worldywca.info

HBPS - Hathay Bunano

<http://www.hathaybunano.com>

Femmes Africa Solidarite

www.fasngo.org/

UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities

www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml

Geneva Women in International Trade

www.gwit.ch

The International Trade Centre/Women and Trade

<http://www.intracen.org/womenandtrade/welcome.htm>

International Finance Corporation - Gender

<http://www.ifc.org/gender>

Rapporteurs

UNHCR/WLL and WIN are grateful to Beatrice Kizi Nzovu and Julie Ochiengs of Femmes Africa Solidarite for producing this report.



PUBLISHED BY:

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Division of International Protection Services
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Back cover:
A Somali refugee in Dadaab.
UNHCR/B. PRESS/CS/KEN-2002

UNHCR / DER-WLL / ENG 1
MARCH 2009

