

**“SOLIDARITY RESETTLEMENT IN ACTION:
POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND NEEDS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR
COOPERATION”**

Quito 2 and 3 February 2006

**Summary of the debate between participating
Governments, NGOs and UNHCR**

Introduction

Government and civil society representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela, as well as UNHCR and IOM, met in Quito on 2 and 3 February 2006 to exchange ideas on how to strengthen and make sustainable the Solidarity Resettlement component of the Mexico Plan of Action, which was adopted in November 2004.

- The meeting recognized and confirmed the long and generous tradition in Latin America to welcome refugees, as the foundation of the Solidarity Resettlement programme in the region. It underlined the importance of this programme’s contribution for responding to humanitarian crisis.
- It emphasized the Solidarity Resettlement framework as the means to strengthen the right to seek asylum and find appropriate durable solutions.
- Equally, it underlined the opportunity provided by this framework for the development of a regional protection network, in order to enhance the capacity of Latin America to receive and integrate refugees.
- It recognized the difficulties of creating a resettlement programme, a task which requires time, as well as the political will of Governments and the support of the receiving communities. The shared responsibility of Governments and civil society was perceived as key to successful implementation of any resettlement programme, particularly during the phases of reception and integration.
- The meeting acknowledged the current strengths of the Solidarity Resettlement Programme, including the good will and positive attitude of all, as well as the existing partnerships between Government and civil society, with each being fully aware of their respective roles.
- The traditional resettlement countries confirmed the positive contribution of resettled refugees to their respective societies, which results in greater diversity as well as a higher degree of acceptance of refugees by public opinion. Resettled refugees have shown that it is possible to become a valuable member of the society of the host country.
- There was consensus on the importance of putting the letter of the Mexico Plan of Action into practice through determined steps by all the countries having adopted it, to implement the regional solidarity component throughout the region.

- Traditional resettlement countries expressed a genuine interest in the regional Solidarity Resettlement programme, to which they have already contributed financially in the past. Although the intention of the meeting was not to request or commit specific funding, it did provide a forum to identify future areas of cooperation to be considered by all participants in the months to come.

Solidarity Resettlement – Challenges encountered

- The resettlement experience in the region has revealed a number of challenges, with participants emphasizing the integration of resettled refugees as being the main difficulty.
- In this context, the lack of funding for integration of refugees in the emerging resettlement countries, as well as UNHCR's budgetary shortfalls, were mentioned as seriously affecting the quality and very existence of the programmes. In this context, the areas of employment, housing and income generation were mentioned as the main concerns.
- The meeting emphasized the difficulty of managing expectations of refugees with regard to the conditions in the resettlement countries, as well as the clear preference for certain countries of destination. It warned that many refugees might perceive resettlement as a way to improve their financial situation.
- The lack of integration possibilities in the first countries of asylum has contributed to the above. These countries recognized their limited capacity to integrate refugees, which is further weakened by existing migratory pressure and their own socio-economic situation.
- Concern was also expressed about the magnification of problems arising from hosting refugees as portrayed by mass media, which could trigger public rejection of refugees and therefore become a significant obstacle for their integration.
- The meeting reiterated the importance of assuring a durable solution through resettlement for all refugees with resettlement needs, independently of their integration potential.
- The meeting suggested that, in view of the initial phase of resettlement programmes in Latin America, the selection of cases for a particular resettlement country within the region be undertaken bearing in mind the capacity of the respective country to ensure the sustainability of resettlement.
- It further recognized the preference of resettlement countries to focus on cases falling under the criterion of legal and physical protection needs. It acknowledged that this does not correspond to the real needs of refugee population in the region, among which there are a number of women-at-risk, survivors of violence and torture, as well as refugees without local integration prospects in the first countries of asylum.
- The meeting acknowledged that one consequence of government preference for certain profiles for resettlement has been an increase in fraud, with some refugees

fabricating protection needs in order to be resettled, while they in fact do have other specific needs that would justify resettlement under another UNHCR criterion.

- As called for under the “Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement” of the Convention Plus initiatives, endorsed by the High Commissioner’s Forum, the meeting called for resettlement countries to consider developing selection criteria to provide themselves with the flexibility to resettle all persons of concern to UNHCR who, in their view, may not fall strictly within the precise terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees.
- The documentation requirements imposed on refugees by some countries also represent a further challenge to the resettlement process. It is not always possible for the applicants to obtain the necessary documentation, such as visas, birth certificates and criminal records, particularly if they are obliged to contact the authorities in their country of origin. It was noted that this could not only delay the resettlement process but also, and most worryingly, endanger the lives or physical security of refugees.
- The meeting noted with concern existing delays in rendering decisions on the selection of resettlement cases and the negative effect of these delays on the protection and well-being of refugees in the first country of asylum.

Proposals to strengthen Solidarity Resettlement in Latin America through cooperation

The first meeting on solidarity resettlement provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and proposals on how to overcome the difficulties in the resettlement process in Latin America. It put forward suggestions on how to strengthen and improve the sustainability of resettlement in the region, in three areas.

General proposals

- The meeting acknowledged the need for a commitment by the emerging resettlement countries, through the allocation of resources towards their own respective programmes, even if limited, as an expression of their political will. In this context, Argentina informed that they would evaluate the possibility of increasing funding for the implementation of their programme. However, during the transition phase, they reiterated the need to obtain external financial cooperation, to concretize the concept of “shared solidarity”.
- The meeting encouraged all countries who subscribed to the Mexico Plan of Action to join the Solidarity Resettlement programme. Mexico mentioned that it is in the process of analyzing a UNHCR proposal for a pilot project on Solidarity Resettlement. Uruguay also expressed its willingness to consider implementing a resettlement pilot project.
- Equally, the meeting agreed that clear support by the international community to emerging resettlement countries is vital for the effective operation and sustainability of the resettlement programmes. The meeting also called for strong support from the international community for local integration programmes in the first country of asylum. This would ensure that resettlement serves its primary objective, and does not turn into a migratory mechanism.

- The meeting called for better coordination among all the resettlement countries, including traditional resettlement countries adopting a broader view of resettlement, and exploring how these programmes could complement the emerging resettlement programmes.
- Norway, currently chairing the Working Group on Resettlement, offered to coordinate the response from traditional resettlement countries in this area. This will be included on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the “Working Group on Resettlement”, which will take place in Geneva on 21 March 2006.
- Also as a follow up to this meeting, UNHCR was requested to coordinate the elaboration of a three-year plan on Solidarity Resettlement in the framework of the Mexico Plan of Action. This plan should include a list of concrete projects, by country and by sector, with the information gathered from the discussions during the meeting. It was requested that the plan be presented at the Working Group on Resettlement in March 2006.
- The meeting also suggested the elaboration of a concrete regional project, with the aim of fostering a (north-south) exchange of experiences and good practices between traditional resettlement countries and emerging resettlement countries, as well as (south-south), between emerging resettlement countries. This project could be directed towards all relevant parties in the resettlement process.
- It suggested other concrete modalities for the exchange of experiences, such as “twinning arrangements” as well as exchange of civil servants with expertise on refugee interviewing techniques. Canada, Norway, Sweden, and the United States of America offered to study concrete proposals of assistance to this end.
- In this context, the United States of America expressed its willingness to extend its existing training programmes to interested countries, thereby contributing to the capacity-building effort.
- Sweden expressed its willingness and commitment to provide specific funds for the support of a regional resettlement programme. Sweden hopes to make concrete proposals during a meeting between the Swedish delegation and the UNHCR Resettlement Section been scheduled for February 2006 in Geneva.
- The Brazilian Government offered to host a regional training center for all parties involved in resettlement activities.
- The meeting recognized the need for an evaluation of the operation of the Solidarity Resettlement Programme to identify its advantages, shortcomings and potential for improvement.
- In this regard, it was recommended that the evaluation also gathers first-hand experiences of resettled refugees, including their integration difficulties in the first country of asylum. This would facilitate planning, and help to better manage their

expectations vis-à-vis emerging resettlement countries. It would also contribute to a successful integration process and limited secondary movements.

- The meeting acknowledged the importance of working with the media, government officials, and political parties, in order to sensitize public opinion and bring to light the positive contribution of refugees to society. This would be essential to facilitate the refugees' integration process.

Resettlement selection criteria

- The meeting recommended that the application of selection criteria should be in line with the UNHCR Resettlement Manual.
- Resettlement countries were asked to be more flexible in the application of resettlement criteria to meet the needs of the refugees in the region and for the resettlement programmes of emerging and traditional resettlement countries to function in a complementary manner.
- Some traditional resettlement countries acknowledged the difficulties faced by emerging resettlement countries in this context and expressed their willingness to consider accepting specific profiles, such as medical cases, women-at-risk, and refugees lacking prospects for local integration.
- UNHCR was requested to identify the most suitable destination for urgent resettlement cases, by considering a variety of possible resettlement countries before submission, in order to meet the specific needs of the identified refugees.
- The meeting underlined the importance of family unity.
- The meeting suggested that the selection process of emerging resettlement countries take fully into account their actual reception capacity so as to ensure the success of emerging resettlement programmes.

Strengthening and improving resettlement procedures, from selection to departure

- The meeting highlighted the importance of objective information about the emerging resettlement country in the selection, counseling and integration of refugees. This information should cover economic, cultural, social and security aspects, and would help to avoid raising unrealistic expectations among refugees. This information could also contain stories on the experience of resettled refugees, if so decided by the resettlement country.
- The meeting called for an adequate planning of selection missions, and prior knowledge of the profile of cases to improve the quality of the interviews and the selection process itself.
- The meeting requested the elaboration of coordinated calendars for selection missions, through consultation between the relevant countries and UNHCR.

- Traditional resettlement countries were requested to undertake smaller selection missions, and to instead accept *dossier submissions* throughout the year, in order to give prominence to the selection missions coming from emerging resettlement countries.
- It stressed the need to ensure funding for selection missions of emerging resettlement countries, in order for these to take place at least on a yearly basis and to ensure adequate resources for UNHCR offices in the region.
- The meeting suggested the elaboration of a clear procedural framework for all stages of the resettlement process in the emerging resettlement countries. In this context, the meeting suggested an exchange of best practices and procedural models between traditional and emerging resettlement countries, including methods to enhance the efficiency of the decision making procedures and the possibility of entering into global agreements with IOM.
- It also requested an exchange of experiences and best practices in the area of documentation procedures, security checks, entry visas and other relevant documentation requirements.
- Some resettlement countries requested that a larger number of cases than the quota offered be referred to them to broaden their choice.
- The meeting also suggested the possibility of transmitting certain resettlement-related information on individual cases in Spanish to the countries so wishing, in order to speed up the decision making process.
- The meeting suggested the establishment of emergency resettlement procedures in all resettlement countries, as has done Brazil.
- The meeting called for international support for the establishment of a housing facility in first countries of asylum that would enable provision of effective protection and assistance to refugees with special needs or in a particularly vulnerable situation, pending resettlement.
- It recommended the use of “declarations of commitment to resettlement” that would be signed by refugees approved for resettlement prior to their departure, to formalize their acceptance of the conditions prevailing in the respective resettlement countries.

Integration of refugees

- The meeting stressed that support to integration programmes for resettled refugees should be given a central role in the process of strengthening the Solidarity Resettlement programme in the region.
- In this context, the meeting called for strategic planning of resettlement, to ensure compatibility between the number of cases received and available funding on resettlement countries, as well as the capacity to integrate refugees in the resettlement country.

- The meeting highlighted the fundamental role played by NGOs in all phases of the resettlement process, particularly with regard to cultural orientation and psychological support provided prior to departure as well as in the integration phase.
- It recommended a careful selection by the resettlement country with regard to urban or rural placement of resettled refugees, taking into account factors such as language, and socio economic and cultural level.
- Further, it highlighted the need for relocation alternatives within the country of resettlement, including rural and urban areas, for cases that do not integrate easily in their first place of settlement (subject to availability of resources to this effect).
- The meeting stressed the need for language courses, when needed, for resettled refugees, in all emerging resettlement countries.
- It recommended involving refugees in the planning and evaluation of the integration process, to ensure the actual success and sustainability of such process.
- The NGOs of traditional resettlement countries offered to share their experience with NGOs in emerging resettlement countries, and mentioned specific examples of projects that have resulted to be particularly effective in obtaining integration of refugees, including programmes developed in Latin America.
- The Canadian Council for Refugees, as well as the Refugee Council USA offered to act as focal points for future exchange visits between the countries.
- The creation of protection networks to strengthen the alliances between all resettlement parties, both within and between resettlement countries, has proven to be a positive experience in the region. In this context, Chile highlighted the value of protection networks to strengthen and support de-centralized resettlement programmes, a project that has been implemented in Arica Province in Chile.
- The meeting highlighted the need to involve local communities in the integration of refugees, and called for the support of the resettlement countries in this area.
- In this context, the meeting suggested the elaboration of local studies on the viability of resettlement and integration for certain areas, with the participation of the local community. This would contribute to creating a feeling of ownership by the local community from the outset.
- Community support groups backed by the State, such as civil groups, regional organizations and ethnic support groups, such as those existing in the USA (which include former refugees) refugees and Canada was mentioned as a positive example to facilitate integration. Further, with this aim, it was proposed to expand and consolidate the Cities of Solidarity and Borders of Solidarity components of the Mexico Plan of Action.
- It called for concrete measures for the inclusion of resettled refugees in existing programmes in the resettlement country, both at the national as well as the municipal level. In this context, the “summer colony” experience in Argentina was mentioned,

as a factor that contributed to the integration of children and, subsequently of entire families.

- The meeting acknowledged the difficulties faced by emerging resettlement countries in providing temporary accommodation to resettled refugees arriving in reception centers. It was recommended that the period refugees stay in these centres be shortened to facilitate their integration from the very beginning at their final destinations.
- The meeting suggested that funds allowing refugees to borrow money to purchase housing be created. One proposal was to establish, through an agency, a leasing system to help refugees buy a home.
- Best practices were exchanged on micro-credit schemes and other projects promoting self-sufficiency, based on the profile of the refugees and their capacity to enter the labor market.
- Several concrete suggestions in the area of integration were made, such as the creation of a programme designed for refugees to obtain their first employment through a study of their profile; incentives to companies to hire refugees which would not only enable refugees to find a job, but attach to the social responsibility of the hiring company through a certificate issued jointly by UNHCR and the Brazilian Government.
- The meeting stressed the importance of swift processing and issuance of personal documentation, such as identification cards, work permits, recognition of academic degrees and professional certificates. These documents are essential for refugees in order to guarantee their enjoyment of their basic rights, and their access to the labor market.
- It was recommended that the word “refugee” be removed from national documents, and replaced with a code permitting authorities to take appropriate measures to ensure the protection of refugees.
- The meeting suggested the development of specific mechanisms in support of refugees with specific needs during the integration process, such as single female heads of household, torture victims, etc. It underlined the need for programmes respecting the cultural values of refugees.
- It stressed the importance of offering cultural orientation and support to refugees during all stages of the resettlement process, to help them adapt to their new host community and ultimately become autonomous persons and full members of the host society.
- The meeting recommended the use of tools available for the attention of resettled refugees, such as the Handbook on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees and the inventory of best practices to strengthen the Solidarity Resettlement programme.

Quito, 3 February 2006