

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. In response to the Kosovo evaluation of February 2000, which established a Plan of Action for UNHCR to increase its effectiveness in emergencies<sup>1</sup>, UNHCR focused its efforts on the following four areas for development: preparedness; response; structural issues and post-emergency management. In March 2001, the Standing Committee received a report providing an overview of progress made in implementing the Plan of Action at that time<sup>2</sup>.

2. Three years on, this paper looks at progress, the impact of complex situational environments on emergency preparedness and response mechanisms; UNHCR's state of readiness; and outstanding challenges in developing the Office's operational approach and emergency management strategies.

### II. OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

3. Continuing changes in the global socio-political and security environment since the early 1990s, and in particular, post-September 11 2001, have left the international community with many more challenges. Humanitarian assistance has to be delivered with increasing frequency in ever more complex and dangerous operational environments. This includes the difficulties and dilemmas inherent in assuring the protection of civilians and securing unhindered and safe access to those in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The direct targeting of United Nations staff in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 was a further tragic example of the dramatic evolution of the challenges facing the humanitarian community today.

4. The nature of refugee emergencies means that UNHCR often has limited warning of mass population movements, resulting in a number of problems and constraints in ensuring situational preparedness for specific courses of action. UNHCR's institutional preparedness, or its generic readiness for any emergency, also remains challenged and must therefore be constantly assessed and improved to enable appropriate response to such challenges.

5. A number of examples over the past decade have shown both the complex nature and the rapid onset of emergencies, including: the Kurdish refugee crisis in Northern Iraq in 1991; the break up of the Republic of Yugoslavia and the ensuing war which spread through Croatia,

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<sup>1</sup> EC/50/SC/INF.5

<sup>2</sup> EC/51/SC/CRP.4

Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo from 1991 to 1999; the genocide in Rwanda in 1994; the independence struggle of East Timor in 1999; and, most recently, the Afghanistan crisis in 2001. These humanitarian emergency situations have shown that enhanced early warning and operational preparedness activities could have improved humanitarian response efforts.

### III. PREPAREDNESS

#### Early Warning

6. Over the past year, UNHCR has been developing its early warning mechanisms. This has included the preparation of a monthly update of a list of “Hot Spot” countries based on external analyses. The Emergency and Security Service (ESS) will expand this programme to incorporate real-time assessments undertaken by various in-house units. These will include the development of key action checklists and the identification of more evident “trigger points” for response activation based upon strengthened early warning. The assessments will also incorporate analyses of staff security, refugee security and pre-deployment planning processes facilitated by ESS.

7. Working closely with OCHA and other United Nations agencies, notably WFP and UNICEF, the Office is developing its information network, based on input from country and regional offices, the analysis of news media and externally commissioned papers. This information not only focuses on deteriorating country situations and their potential impact on UNHCR’s operations, but also identifies opportunities in peace and stability processes that may lead to voluntary repatriation. UNHCR’s early warning information and analyses are also shared with other United Nations agencies. Through the Inter-Agency Task Force, the Office is helping build commitment to sharing lessons and joining efforts in order to improve early warning tools, and develop a more collaborative inter-agency situational assessment and response mechanism. These moves to pool lessons learned and develop a partnership approach are designed to improve the overall efficiency of collaboration amongst humanitarian actors, as well as the timeliness and quality of humanitarian service delivery to beneficiaries.

#### Contingency Planning

8. EPRS has conducted contingency planning training and preparedness workshops through a number of specific missions to regions and countries. This service has helped to strengthen contingency planning in country teams, and has enhanced their preparedness capacities during times of increased humanitarian alert. Meanwhile, ESS has commenced a review and revision of UNHCR’s Contingency Planning Guidelines which will incorporate the Inter-Agency Guidelines and will update security issues in light of recent events and incidents.

#### Training

9. UNHCR has placed great emphasis on training staff on working in emergencies - the backbone of institutional preparedness. The UNHCR Workshop on Emergency Management (WEM) and the Situational Emergency Training (SET) programmes are two key programmes. The WEM prepares individuals to work efficiently as members of emergency teams within dynamic operational situations; while EPRS has maintained an Emergency Response Team

roster made up of qualified staff on 72-hour standby notice for emergency deployment. The SET programme focuses on regional situations that are deteriorating or show signs of doing so. Preparatory activities have been undertaken for a Senior Management Seminar aimed at sensitizing representatives, heads of offices and Geneva-based senior operations managers on staff security matters, and at further mainstreaming security management and awareness within country programmes. Recent conflicts have indicated the possible use or presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In preparation for such a worst case scenario, NBC training (nuclear, biological and chemical) has been provided for a number of UNHCR staff.

10. UNHCR's e-Centre has contributed towards developing emergency preparedness and response mechanisms within the Asia-Pacific region. This has been achieved through offering training services (including distance learning), knowledge resources and information networking in the field of complex humanitarian emergency management related to mass population displacement. An evaluation of the e-Centre and UNHCR's broader emergency preparedness and response activities within the region will take place during 2004.

### Equipment

11. Adequate and appropriate quantities of rapidly transportable field equipment are vital to maintain UNHCR's overall emergency preparedness capacity. The Office must set the highest standards to ensure that quality and technological advantage are fully considered during the procurement of equipment for emergency response situations. Following the 2001 report to the Standing Committee, in collaboration with a number of partners, UNHCR has developed a relatively inexpensive emergency lightweight shelter which is easily stored, can be carried by individuals and may be air-dropped if required.

12. The Office has been maintaining regional stockpiles as well as a central emergency stockpile (CES). The CES, which can be deployed within 48 hours, allows an operational response for any new influx of up to 250,000 refugees. The stockpile includes non-perishable food items, vehicles and other field equipment. UNHCR has emergency framework agreements in place with suppliers through the Supply Management Service (SMS) in case the CES capacity is over-stretched.

### Partnership

13. In an increasingly crowded humanitarian environment, UNHCR has actively sought to foster closer working relationships with standby partners. This has provided useful access to specialized knowledge resources, as well as to additional personnel for emergency rosters, allowing UNHCR to better prepare and respond to complex emergencies. For example, UNHCR's partnership with Technisches Hilfswerk (THW) – the German Government's disaster relief organization - foresees the development of standby modules for basic refugee camp layout, road and bridge repair, and water supply maintenance.

14. The high cost of emergency preparedness and response obliges UNHCR to develop closer working partnership with donors. With the aim of enhancing institutional and situational preparedness, the Office has secured a grant from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) to be used for emergency preparedness and response, notably

the development of early warning mechanisms. Under the overall coordination of OCHA, UNCHR has continued its efforts alongside other United Nations agencies in providing emergency relief assistance to beneficiaries, and has also contributed to the inter-agency fora developing emergency and response mechanisms.

15. The physical protection of refugees and others of concern remains a serious challenge to States, UNHCR and the international community. Extending beyond the international protection mandate and competence of the Office, ensuring refugees' physical security more often requires an effective liaison between UNHCR and the security authorities, including regional or United Nations-mandated peacekeeping missions (such as in Afghanistan, Liberia and Kosovo). As indicated in the 2001 report to the Standing Committee, UNHCR has sought to better understand and ensure the necessary interaction with the military, including specific areas of possible collaboration with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Working together with UNHCR's Department of International Protection (DIP), ESS remains Headquarters' focal point on a number of refugee security-related issues, and is contributing to an in-depth analysis of situations of armed conflict through which policy and practical guidance in maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum are being developed.

#### IV. RESPONSE

16. Within the post-September 11 'new world' environment, the response of the Office has focused on the need to find a correct balance between satisfying UNHCR's protection mandate while at the same time ensuring a secure work environment for staff. By utilizing an extensive information network to make reasonable and well informed decisions about security, UNHCR in close collaboration with other agencies, is developing a risk management template for senior managers and decision-makers. The need to incorporate security assessments as a fully integrated process within situational preparedness and response, together with the effective use of early warning indicators, has become imperative for UNHCR and the humanitarian community as a whole. Under the direction of ESS, the Office has moved towards a more evident and seamless connection between the functions of staff security and emergency response.

17. During 2003, UNHCR dedicated a total of 14,000 mission days to emergency response. UNHCR's standby partners (including the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, United Nations Volunteers, DFID and Save the Children) also provided professional staff for almost half that number again. The emergency response missions covered some 23 different countries, which included: Chad, southern Sudan, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Angola, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Thailand and Malaysia.

18. On average, the Emergency Response Teams were deployed for periods of two months; however, this was often extended due to operational priorities and essential requirements while posts were being created and staff appointed. UNHCR has tried to improve this process through the 'fast-track' programme, which was so successfully applied during the Afghanistan Operation.

19. Real-time evaluations have been undertaken by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) for a number of recent emergencies, including Sudan/Eritrea, Angola, Afghanistan and Liberia. The purpose is to ensure a timely, rapid and interactive peer review of fast evolving humanitarian operations. This approach has proven important in the development of UNHCR's

emergency response capacity by allowing an immediate assessment of effectiveness and impact of any given UNHCR response. As such, it has also been used as a catalyst for organizational and operational change; and it has indicated the need for internally and externally driven integrated approaches to complex humanitarian emergencies. Another product of the real-time evaluations has been the continuous development of, and improvements to, the emergency field and office kits, checklists and guidelines by EPRS.

## V. CONCLUSION

20. Following the Kosovo crisis, UNHCR has moved forward in many areas and aspects of its emergency preparedness and response approach, and it has implemented measures listed within the Plan of Action. However, it is all too evident that, in the post-September 11 environment, the humanitarian community today faces a number of critical challenges in some parts of the world with regard to securing safe and unhindered access to civilians caught up in armed conflict, and the resultant risks of insecurity for its workers.

21. Therefore, and arguably more than ever before, a core challenge for UNHCR and many others remains the continued development and timely implementation of effective, predictable - yet flexible - preparedness and response mechanisms in order to best engage in complex humanitarian emergencies where the protection of civilians is of the utmost urgency.

22. UNHCR's institutional preparedness will require continuous improvement. This will include staff training, systems development and management, effective internal and external partnerships and adequate standby agreements. A designed shift towards integrated services and more holistic approaches will provide the foundation for UNHCR's evolving strategies in emergency and security management. It is expected that such an approach will strengthen the Office's capacity in early warning, preparedness and response, and at the same time allow the continued development of strong partnership with a number of other United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations.

23. Good early warning analysis is one of the first rungs on any situational response ladder, and as such, UNHCR will build on its 'Hot Spots' initiative and improve organizational response 'triggers' based on strong internal early warning analysis and discussion. Meanwhile, the Office will continue to enhance its support to emergency response officers and field-based staff, and will seek to strengthen the inter-agency dialogue around lessons learned, best practice and knowledge sharing.

24. UNHCR will keep the Standing Committee informed of challenges faced and progress made in strengthening emergency preparedness and response capacities, and looks forward to the Committee's continued strong support, and any direction it may be able to offer for managing this formidable task.