

**REGIONAL STRATEGIC PRESENTATION SUMMARY  
TO 35<sup>th</sup> STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING (7-9 March 2006)**

**Bureau for CASWANAME**

**Part A: Introduction**

In 2006, the Bureau will focus on identifying comprehensive solutions for refugee situations; supporting State and civil society entities to actively protect persons of concern, in partnership with key stakeholders; and ensuring that humanitarian considerations are effectively prioritized.

Increasing humanitarian challenges in the CASWANAME region in the last months have required an emergency response and rapid mobilization of key stakeholders to effectively deliver protection and assistance to persons of concern. In partnership with others, UNHCR has delivered and coordinated assistance to earthquake survivors in Pakistan living in camp situations. The Office has also sought to address the immediate protection needs of asylum-seekers in the mixed flow of migrants and asylum-seekers in North Africa and Yemen. In August and September 2005, UNHCR with the Government of Afghanistan supported the sudden return of over 150,000 Afghans from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan following the closure of camps for security reasons, just before the onset of winter. In Central Asia, urgent protection advocacy efforts were undertaken in cooperation with others to secure the protection of Uzbek refugees under threat of deportation; these efforts continue. In Egypt, emergency measures were implemented to address the reception and registration of Sudanese in Cairo, as well as review the claims of those in detention.

The scale of the October 2005 earthquake in South Asia, which left approximately 1.9 million persons homeless in Pakistan, and UNHCR's operational strength in Pakistan guided UNHCR's involvement on humanitarian grounds. UNHCR is responsible for coordinating assistance to persons in camp situations (of above 50 tents) as lead agency for the camp management cluster. There is a quiet confidence that the inter-agency 'race against winter' has been successful and a second wave of mortality averted. UNHCR will maintain the current level of assistance and support until summer 2006, after which the Government of Pakistan will take over the management and coordination of camps. A challenge in the coming months for the international community will be to ensure that the needs of returning camp populations are prioritized in the early recovery phase so that there is no 'gap' in the transfer of responsibilities from humanitarian agencies to recovery and reconstruction agencies.

In Iraq, UNHCR's 'Advisory Related to the International Protection Response for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers from Iraq' of September 2005 remains unchanged. UNHCR still believes that conditions in central and southern Iraq are not yet conducive to the return of Iraqi refugees, although return to the north is considered feasible, providing that the returned persons have family and community links that can ensure their access to protection, housing and other basic services.

With regard to Afghanistan, the London Compact of 31 January-1 February 2006 marked the positive engagement of the international community for a further five-year period in Afghanistan to support three pillars of activity, namely: security; governance, rule of law and human rights; and, economic and social development. Progress in these critical areas will be vital to support the sustainable reintegration of some 4 million Afghans who have already returned, as well as to open up new areas of return for the remaining 3 million Afghans in the region. Strengthened regional cooperation may also contribute to the improved living and working conditions of the Afghan population in the region. The deteriorating security situation in southern Afghanistan is however of concern, and may hinder return as well as UNHCR's access to the population.

**Part B: Progress on UNHCR's Strategic Objectives for 2006 and implementation of the Agenda for Protection**

Advocate for and support governments in the creation and maintenance of an international protection regime (GSO#1, AfP Goal 1, 2).

The migration/asylum issue is very much at the centre of regional developments, especially in **North Africa** with increasing numbers of persons contacting UNHCR for protection in the region. Yemen is witnessing another transit phenomenon that can not be forgotten. In January 2006, hundreds more Ethiopians and Somalis lost their lives in un-seaworthy boats at the hands of people smugglers attempting to cross the Gulf of Aden. Due to continuing instability and fragile socio-economic situation in sub-Saharan Africa, more and more persons are prepared to risk their lives making the dangerous crossing across the Gulf of Aden by boat or crossing the Sahara desert by foot. Greater international support and cooperation is required to effectively manage this complex issue, not only as a migration problem but also as a humanitarian refugee protection problem for which solutions will need to be collectively identified and implemented.

A key protection problem is to identify bona fide asylum-seekers in the mixed flow of persons from sub-Saharan Africa, as well as to identify and implement solutions for persons recognized as refugees. UNHCR recognizes that comprehensive policy responses are required in order to manage the irregular movements, as well as the needs of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who currently transit through North Africa. Such responses need to be carefully crafted in cooperation with the countries of destination (European Union Member States), the countries in the region facing similar problems, the countries of origin (mainly sub-Saharan Africa) and other national and international organizations.

UNHCR looks forward to the active cooperation of governments in North Africa to give UNHCR full access to persons amongst the migratory flows in need of international protection; in particular, access to asylum-seekers in migrant locations and immigration detention centres. UNHCR also stands ready to support governments to enlarge the protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers, for example by instituting channelling mechanisms at point of entry, in cooperation with others, to rapidly identify the profile of persons and refer them to the appropriate migration or refugee institution for processing. UNHCR welcomes the exemplary actions of Mauritania in protecting asylum-seekers who arrive in the mixed flow of asylum-seekers and migrants on its territory, as well as Mauritania's efforts to build a national migration management policy that takes into account the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as the interests of the Mauritanian national community.

In **Central Asia**, there are increasing protection challenges and UNHCR is working with key stakeholders to ensure that humanitarian concerns are prioritized. UNHCR remains concerned by the situation of four Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan, all of whom were recognized in October 2005 as mandate refugees by UNHCR in full consideration of the 'exclusion clause'. UNHCR stands ready to support the Government of Kyrgyzstan with a solution for the four refugees.

In **Iraq**, since the fall of the previous regime, UNHCR has been responsible for the protection of 50,000 refugees of whom 34,000 are Palestinians. The overall security and protection situation of refugees has deteriorated over the past three years. In 2005, UNHCR had to relocate 3,000 Iranian refugees from Al Tash camp to safer areas in Iraqi Kurdistan region. In the Baghdad area, there are increasing protection problems for Palestinian and Syrian refugees. UNHCR is working in partnership with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) to improve the protection of the refugees. Since 2004, UNHCR has been involved, in partnership with IOM, in strengthening the new Iraqi MoDM. While IOM concentrates on administration, finances and human resources, UNHCR covers legal, policy advocacy and humanitarian issues. Workshops are under way with departments on functional areas of work; the next phase will concentrate on standard operating procedures as well as specialized training. A National Policy on Displacement is being developed. The goal is to ensure that the MoDM has the capacity to effectively discharge its responsibilities, and that Iraq eventually accedes to the 1951 Convention.

The structure of operations in the **Middle East** will be reviewed this year with a view to gradually mainstreaming core protection activities for Iraqis in neighbouring countries into UNHCR's Annual Budget. There are approximately 900,000 Iraqis in surrounding countries. Most left Iraq under the previous regime, but due to security conditions do not yet want to return to their homes. There is a need to review and reinvigorate the so-called temporary protection regime in the region.

Ensure international standards of protection for girls, boys, women and men of concern to UNHCR are met (overall mandate objective, AfP Goal 6)

**Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM)** in North Africa and the Middle East continues to have a positive impact on the way UNHCR works by supporting refugees to participate in defining their needs and setting priorities. However, there is increasing intolerance of refugees, in particular in urban settings. Protection, safety and security continue to be the main concerns of refugee groups, including children and adolescents. Positive interventions by UNHCR include the sensitization of implementing partner staff to age and gender issues and more systematic use of participatory assessments; improved reception facilities for females; and hiring of female guards in some offices. There is now a better surveillance of and response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in refugee settlements.

UNHCR in Afghanistan has supported **women at risk** since 2002, originally to provide immediate protection to unaccompanied women returning to Afghanistan from asylum countries with the establishment of safe houses. Since then, UNHCR has strengthened its response to support the capacity of national institutions and civil society to protect women survivors of SGBV in legal and health matters as well as immediate protection. A constraint is the cultural sensitivity with regard to SGBV and the need to increase awareness in public institutions that SGBV is a public health and human rights issue. UNHCR supports capacity-building activities with Afghan women's NGOs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs as well as the establishment of Women's Resource Centres to provide counselling, mediation peer support, legal and health services as well as community outreach in rural areas. The AGDM project will be launched in Afghanistan this year.

Pursue voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, resettlement or local integration for refugees; with a special focus on those in protracted refugees situations (GSO#2, 3, 7, AfP Goal 5)

Over 4 million Afghans have returned to **Afghanistan** since 2002. For the remaining 3.5 million Afghans in neighbouring countries, repatriation remains the preferred solution. UNHCR plans to support 600,000 Afghans in 2006, and in the next three years significant levels of return can be expected so long as the current steady progress in Afghanistan continues. The continuing insecurity on the southern border is, however, of concern. The London Compact signals an important commitment of the international community to support the recovery of Afghanistan. Any progress in areas of security, governance and human rights will also open up new areas of return and support the reintegration of returnees.

The strategic consultations on population movements to and from Afghanistan that took place last October and February 2005 with regional governments and key stakeholders have been successful in forging a common understanding on the need to identify a range of solutions for Afghans who may not yet be able to return, in the form of a comprehensive solutions framework. Negotiations will continue in 2006, moving to the practical regional level to support bilateral and regional partnerships regulating migration and population issues in partnership with IOM and ILO.

In 2006, the Government of **Pakistan** is planning to register Afghans in the country, following the census last year which counted 3 million, not all of whom are of concern to UNHCR. Registered Afghans in Pakistan will receive a renewable ID card as proof of registration. In Pakistan, in addition to supporting the voluntary repatriation of Afghans, UNHCR is also working towards a shift from traditional humanitarian partnerships towards development agencies with the 'refugee-affected areas programme'. The European Union and other agencies have made an important commitment to include refugee-affected areas in their national development programmes, a positive example of the international commitment to

support comprehensive solutions to this protracted situation. In the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, return will also remain a priority. The Government is planning to complete the re-registration of the Afghan caseload which, together with a review of livelihood conditions, will allow UNHCR and the Government to better target assistance to the most vulnerable. The current cross-border movement of Afghans in the region in search of seasonal employment is significant, although the economic value of labour migration is unknown. It is hoped that increased regional cooperation, as recognized by the London Compact, will allow for better management of cross-border movement in the region.

The tragic events in December 2005 in Cairo, in which 27 Sudanese died and many were injured when police intervened to end a three-month sit-in by some 2500 Sudanese seeking resettlement, underlined the need for the international community to advance meaningful comprehensive solutions for the Sudanese, whether in their place of origin, in Egypt or elsewhere. There are reportedly 2 million **Sudanese** in **Egypt** who remain under Egyptian regulations governing the residence of Sudanese, including the recently concluded Four Freedoms Agreement. UNHCR is currently reviewing its policy in Egypt with regards to Sudanese refugees and will negotiate a series of options with the Government of Egypt in the coming period.

In **Iraq**, there have been over 250,000 refugee returns and 300,000 IDP returns. UNHCR remains engaged in close coordination with UNAMI to find durable solutions through return and reintegration of some 1.3 million IDPs in Iraq, and some 1 million refugees in the region. Resolving land and property issues remains one of the priorities that will help the return process. UNHCR is working with the Iraqi Property Claims Commission (IPCC) to facilitate more streamlined and transparent processes, encouraging more effective outreach to potential claimants before the extended June 2007 deadline; an expedited decision-making process; and the establishment of effective enforcement mechanisms, including a compensation fund for fulfilment of awards. UNHCR hopes, circumstances permitting, to enhance its presence and capacity inside Iraq over and above its current level. UNHCR is working with 24 implementing partners in the country.

Residents of the former **No-Mans-Land (NML) camp** on the Iraqi-Jordanian border were moved to Ruwayshed camp in Jordan in May 2005, and the NML camp was officially closed. UNHCR remains committed to pursuing durable solutions for the relocated refugees. Plans to close the Ruwayshed camp by September 2006 are dependent on resettlement countries' willingness to accept refugees from Ruwayshed. Some 200 ex-Al Tash refugees who arrived in the course of 2005 are still blocked at the border (on the Iraqi side) and so far have been unwilling to move to the Iraqi Kurdistan region where all the Al Tash community was recently relocated.

In **Central Asia**, UNHCR will prepare for the implementation of the 'cessation clause', in cooperation with governments and civil society actors in the region, to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place to identify persons still in need of international protection, as well as to ensure issues of nationality, statelessness and return are resolved. UNHCR welcomes the impressive progress made by the Government of Turkmenistan in support of solutions for Tajik refugees. Since the Presidential Decree in August 2005, so far 62 per cent of all refugees have received Turkmen citizenship, with almost 90 per cent in some districts. It is expected that the naturalization process will be finished by May 2006. Citizenship for Afghan refugees will be discussed in a second phase. The strategic use of resettlement will also be pursued to secure solutions for Afghans in Central Asia.

The exchange of family visits as part of the Confidence-Building Measures (CBM) programme for the **Saharan** populations resumed in November 2005 and is ongoing – a positive development to this protracted refugee situation. A total of 101 families (574 persons) have benefited from these visits since the resumption of activities. The telephone service is also operational, with a total of 42,600 calls being made between the two communities since the start of the programme. The first phase of the joint UNHCR/MINURSO CBM project was launched in March 2004 and continued until December 2004. A further appeal will be launched shortly to enable this programme to continue throughout 2006.

Pursue management reform to enhance the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of UNHCR's operations; strengthen UNHCR's support for collaborative efforts to comprehensively address situations of internal displacement (GSO#5) and strengthen UNHCR's preparedness and response capacity (GSO#4).

UNHCR is committed to supporting the collaborative effort in Iraq to comprehensively address situations of **internal displacement** as lead agency of Cluster F on refugees, IDPs and Durable Solutions, and chair of the IDP Working Group. UNHCR's reintegration assistance for returnees in Iraq since 2003, also includes assistance to 300,000 IDP returnees, of the 1.3 million IDPs in Iraq. Many refugees returning to Iraq return to a situation of further displacement. Grass roots consultations are taking place to raise awareness on IDP rights and to identify key issues to include in the National Policy of Displacement. A survey is also being developed on 'IDP intentions'. A National Conference is tentatively scheduled for October 2006 to finalize the National Policy for Displacement.

In **Afghanistan** UNHCR has been involved in supporting comprehensive solutions for IDPs since 2002 when there were over 1 million IDPs. Today there are 50,000 IDPs of concern to UNHCR in Afghanistan. The goal is that by the end of 2006, all IDPs will have found solutions locally or returned to their homes.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR has fully supported the "cluster" leadership approach which saw its first implementation in the inter-agency response to the South Asia Earthquake, although the approach had not been fully developed. UNHCR is committed to address the needs of persons affected by the earthquake as lead agency for the camp coordination management cluster as well as participate in the protection cluster, until such responsibilities are handed over to the Government this summer.

Efforts to maintain an **emergency and preparedness response** at the Bureau level, with vital support and cooperation with the Emergency and Security Service, have proved a valuable contribution during the Central Asia crisis and Pakistan earthquake response. They have allowed for greater operational flexibility, whether through the redeployment of staff from CASWANAME operations, or the use of project stockpiles, vehicles, and telecoms equipment. The historic support of NATO countries in transporting UNHCR relief items for the Pakistan earthquake response was greatly appreciated and an invaluable contribution to the success of the operation. For 2006, the Bureau is in the process of identifying staff within the region for standby emergency deployment and the replenishment of project stock piles is ongoing.

The **roll-out of MSRP** within the CASWANAME region is under way with the goal to eventually achieve efficiency and productivity gains. By spring 2006 all the Central Asian countries, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, will go "live". By October, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen will go "live". The roll-out date for Afghanistan will depend on improved satellite communications, in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya more training on finance is required, and in Pakistan the roll-out was postponed to enable the office to focus on the earthquake response. For Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia, further training in finance is required and connectivity problems (and associated costs) also have to be resolved.