

**REGIONAL STRATEGIC PRESENTATION SUMMARY
TO 38th STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING (6-9 March 2007)**

Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

Part A: Introduction

In 2006, UNHCR embarked on a restructuring process which resulted in the reconfiguration of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, which now includes South-west Asia (Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan), as well as Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). The new structure became effective on 1 January 2007 and this note reflects the expanded geographical coverage.

Some 5.82 million people are currently forcibly displaced and/or in need of solutions in the Asia-Pacific region. These include over 4.1 million asylum-seekers and refugees, as well as some 754,000¹ internally displaced persons (IDPs). The overall figure also refers to some 426,000 refugees and IDP returnees, as well as 976,000 stateless and other people of concern to UNHCR. The region is host to a number of protracted refugee situations, both in urban and camp-based contexts, which continue to require urgent and bold action to devise solutions in a humanitarian manner. The number of refugees in camps totals more than 1.48 million, most of whom have been in camps for more than 15 years.

During 2006, major progress was made in identifying durable solutions through the strategic use of resettlement for Myanmar refugees in Thailand, Malaysia and to some degree in Bangladesh. Similarly, significant progress was made in finding durable solutions for Tajik and Afghan refugees in Central Asia.

In Nepal, the Government agreed to UNHCR carrying out a census of the camp population, which began in November 2006. In Pakistan, a four-month long campaign, ending on 15 February, resulted in the registration of 2.16 million Afghan citizens. In Malaysia, persons of concern from Aceh (Indonesia) were granted temporary permits by the authorities. Living conditions in the camps in Bangladesh have started improving, following the agreement by the authorities to let UNHCR upgrade basic infrastructure and individual shelters.

However, based on geopolitical changes and as a result of the Andijan events, Central Asia has witnessed an increase in protection challenges. After four years of exceptionally high levels of repatriation, the number of people returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan (133,000) and from the Islamic Republic of Iran (5,000), declined considerably in 2006. This has led to renewed pressure to accelerate the repatriation of the remaining populations estimated at 2.16 million (in Pakistan) and 920,000 (in the Islamic Republic of Iran).

Since the political developments of September 2006, asylum space in Thailand has seen a considerable reduction. In south-east Myanmar UNHCR still does not have access to all of the populations displaced by conflict. In Sri Lanka, the protection and assistance situation of internally displaced persons has seriously deteriorated due to major military confrontations between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelamin (LTTE) in the north and east of the country, resulting in some 200,000 newly displaced persons in 2006. In the absence of political solutions to the complex crisis in Timor-Leste, some 25,000 IDPs remain in emergency shelter in camps. In Indonesia, the response to the tsunami has continued to face serious challenges resulting in delays in its implementation.

¹. IDP numbers are estimates dated January 2007 for Sri Lanka (520,000), Timor-Leste (100,000) and Afghanistan (134,000). Other numbers are based on the 2007 Global Appeal.

Part B: Progress on UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives (GSOs) for 2007 and implementation of the Agenda for Protection (AfP)

Ensure international standards of protection are met for all persons of concern to UNHCR taking into account their age, gender or personal background (GSO 1, AfP Goals 1, 2, 5 and 6)

Protection against refoulement, improving physical security, reducing incidents of violence, including SGBV

In most countries in the region, measures are now in place to improve the protection situation both in camps and in urban settings, through the elaboration and implementation of standard operating procedures for SGBV and child protection. In Thailand, initiatives such as the Legal Aid Centres and Administration of Justice projects are responding to the specific needs of refugee women and children. In Bangladesh, Malaysia and Nepal, registration and other screening mechanisms serve to identify persons in need of special protection measures. In India, the Women's Protection Clinic provides a venue for identifying risks and finding immediate solutions to the problems of all Myanmar refugee women (protection outreach and monitoring).

In Central Asia, access to asylum-seekers has been restricted, the granting of refugee status is relatively arbitrary, and in general, asylum space is shrinking. Recent incidents in other parts of Asia, including the near *refoulement* of a group of recognized refugees, show that enlarging the humanitarian/asylum space continues to be a challenge in the region.

Preventing malnutrition and reducing prevalence and impact of HIV and AIDS

The establishment of a regional HIV and AIDS position in Bangkok enhanced the development and implementation of a regional strategy, and country-specific HIV and AIDS programmes. In Central Asia, each office deals with HIV and AIDS through refugee community centres. Major efforts are also under way to address malnutrition in camps in Bangladesh and in other countries in the region.

Securing civil, social and economic rights (self-reliance) with particular attention to rights of women and children

Participatory assessments with refugees were carried out throughout the region to ensure an age, gender and diversity mainstreaming approach in programme design and implementation. Special efforts have been undertaken to work with refugee communities, in particular in camp environments. In October 2006, the High Commissioner signed an agreement with the Iranian Minister of the Interior to support joint projects providing greater economic and social support to the most vulnerable Afghan refugee families in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ensuring the right to education

In Malaysia, persons from Aceh with temporary permits have been granted access to public education. Advocacy regarding access for other groups is continuing and complemented by support to community-based schooling projects. The Government of Bangladesh has agreed to increase primary schooling in the camps by one additional grade. Language and skills training, as well as adult literacy classes have also been introduced. UNHCR continues to advocate for access to higher education for Myanmar refugees in the camps in Thailand. In Central Asia, UNHCR has managed to integrate most of the refugee children into local schools with some after-school education on their mother tongue, traditions and the history of their country of origin.

Increasing and improving level and quality of registration of persons of concern

Most countries in Asia have benefited from the Project Profile roll out and completed the registration of refugees. The introduction of registration through outreach in the communities in Malaysia has resulted in better services for asylum-seekers, particularly to persons with special needs. The “ProGres” software application was rolled out in 2006 in Bangladesh and all refugees in the camps in Cox’s Bazaar have been registered. The Government has agreed to the replacement of family books by identity cards during 2007 as well as to the issuance of birth certificates to all refugee children. The refugee census carried out with the authorities in Nepal is expected to be completed in May 2007. In Pakistan, the final total of the registration by 15 February 2007 amounts to some 2.16 million persons. They will be issued individual documentation in the form of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards entitling them to remain in Pakistan for three years.

Advocate for and support governments in the development and maintenance of an international protection regime including its implementation at the national level (GSO 2, AfP Goal 1)

Preserving asylum space

UNHCR’s primary objective in Asia is to ensure that refugee protection regimes are sustained through strengthening the capacities of States. UNHCR has actively engaged with the Governments of China and India on the issue of developing relevant national legislation. In Kazakhstan, UNHCR has initiated discussions with the Government to adopt a national refugee law, which will be consistent with international standards. Despite occasional setbacks, active dialogue with the Governments and other key partners in the region has contributed to advancing the understanding of protection needs of refugees and to promoting the adoption of concrete measures, e.g. respect of UNHCR documentation; access to public health care at reduced rates; and release from detention. The establishment of a regional protection hub in Malaysia is contributing to improve UNHCR’s protection delivery under its mandate as well as to ensure regional coherence and coordination.

Strengthen host country capacity to undertake refugee status determination (RSD)

In Asia, UNHCR has been pursuing its efforts to build the institutional capacity of the governments to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees in order to assume full responsibility for status determination. Particular interventions are being made in Central Asia to include nationals from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), who often tend to be excluded from the process by virtue of the Minsk Agreement. In Tajikistan, the Office’s participation as an observer in the RSD Commission has been resumed and UNHCR’s opinion is being acknowledged.

Addressing situations of statelessness

In 2006, a comprehensive legal study on the legal status of the Bihari/Urdu-speaking community was completed in Bangladesh. UNHCR has promoted their inclusion in UNDP poverty reduction programmes, whilst advocating for their accession to effective citizenship. The situation of the former Cambodian refugees in Viet Nam has seen positive developments with renewed commitment by the Vietnamese Government to moving forward with their naturalization. As regards the situation of stateless residents of northern Rakhine State in Myanmar, UNHCR is negotiating the issuance of temporary registration certificates to all eligible persons, through a campaign to be implemented in 2007. In Nepal, UNHCR is conducting a study to identify stateless populations and to recommend solutions.

The reduction of statelessness is also being pursued as part of the overall protection approach of UNHCR in Central Asia. In Turkmenistan, over 10,000 Tajik refugees have received Turkmen citizenship. The naturalization campaign for Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan is almost complete with some 8,700 persons naturalized. Together with the Government of Kyrgyzstan, UNHCR is presently trying to identify the scope of the statelessness’ situation of an estimated number of 100,000 persons and to devise an approach to address the situation.

Redoubling the search for durable solutions (GSO 3, AfP Goal 5)

Promoting the creation of conditions conducive to return

Despite the return of over 4.8 million Afghans since 2002, the Office continues to be active in highlighting the return and reintegration challenges for the remaining 3.2 million Afghans in the region. Since 80 per cent of these populations have been outside Afghanistan for more than 20 years (approximately half were born in exile) and a significant proportion originates from areas affected by the rise in violence last year, their return will be more complex and require greater support and attention. UNHCR is examining with key stakeholders how this challenge can be met.

UNHCR is working with the Myanmar Government on further improvement of conditions in northern Rakhine State to facilitate the resumption of voluntary repatriation from Bangladesh, for example, through the issuance of legal documents to all returnees and all other *de facto* stateless persons.

Developing and implementing comprehensive strategies for protracted situations

In Nepal, the Core Group's decisive and effective steps in support of UNHCR's objectives have resulted in the start of registration of all refugees; effective resettlement of small groups of vulnerable persons, for the first time; and the offer of group resettlement for the majority of the population. In Bangladesh, a framework for a comprehensive and collective strategy for durable solutions is being devised with the Government, with strong support from interested stakeholders, including the UN Country Team. The two-year strategy focuses on improving the human rights condition of Rohingya refugees and promoting durable solutions for this protracted situation.

Coordinated efforts, involving all stakeholders, are being made to identify potential solutions for the situation of Myanmar refugees in Thailand. In addition to large-scale resettlement, focused initiatives are being taken with the Government, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), to identify self-reliance activities which could lead to employment possibilities.

In South-west Asia, the Office has continued to explore how new approaches to meet the challenges of the Afghanistan situation, notably the complexity of contemporary population movements, can be pursued. There are ongoing discussions with the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan over the granting of work permits to registered Afghans in Islamic Republic of Iran. In Pakistan, the preliminary assessment phase of a programme offering longer term structural support to local communities hosting large numbers of Afghans was completed in September. In Afghanistan, the Office has worked in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and ILO to provide technical assistance and support to relevant government institutions. UNHCR has also published the findings of its regional research programme in Afghanistan related to contemporary population movements, the economic impact of refugee populations, and reintegration challenges.

Strengthening local integration

The sustained advocacy campaign for access to naturalization of Afghans of Hindu and Sikh ethnicity in India and the successful completion of the naturalization process for some in 2006, demonstrate a positive example of the role that States can play in securing solutions for protracted cases. Similarly, the implementation of the cessation of refugee status for Tajik refugees in June 2006 signalled the forthcoming achievement of local integration of the Tajiks in their host countries. As already mentioned, in Turkmenistan over 10,000 Tajik refugees have received Turkmen citizenship, and the naturalization campaign for Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan is now almost complete, with some 8,700 persons naturalized.

In Central Asia, partnerships are essential to support the delivery of protection and the establishment of a favourable climate for the integration of recognized refugees and reintegration of returnees. Partnerships are being strengthened and operationalized with civil society institutions, protection advocacy and human

rights NGOs, international organizations, donors and key States in the region. UNHCR's participation in the Common Country Assessment process and the inclusion of protracted caseloads in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), through community-based programmes are two major areas where the Office is cooperating closely with UNDP and other development actors.

Enhancing the use of resettlement as a strategic protection tool and burden-sharing mechanism

In a spirit of burden sharing, resettlement countries have provided UNHCR with slots for most of the remaining Afghans in India. With the support of major resettlement countries, Myanmar refugees in Thailand and Malaysia are in the process of finding durable solutions through group resettlement. In Indonesia, UNHCR has engaged in an active search for durable solutions for some 240 refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan who have been stranded there for years.

The use of resettlement as a strategic protection tool has been achieved in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and India. Presently, it is being pursued for the Afghan refugees in Kazakhstan and in Uzbekistan.

Implementing effective exit and phase-down strategies through partnerships

In Tajikistan, UNHCR's returnee programme for Tajiks is about to be phased out, and reintegration activities will be taken over by development agencies. In all Central Asian Republics, Afghan refugees have also benefited from durable solutions, with many of them successfully resettled in third countries and some pursuing permanent residency status with the support of UNHCR. With the achievement of solutions for these protracted refugee situations and the progressive hand over of activities to other partners (e.g. UN agencies), the Office foresees downsizing its operations in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and, later on, in Kazakhstan.

Establish effective partnerships and frameworks for action for responding to the challenges of protecting and finding solutions for persons internally displaced due to conflict and abuses of human rights; protecting refugees in broader migration movements; and bridging the gap between relief and development (GSO 4, AfP Goals 2, 3)

Supporting and leading efforts to provide protection and solutions for internally displaced persons as part of a collaborative response

Following its emergency intervention in Timor-Leste, efforts are now being undertaken by UNHCR to create an environment conducive to return and reconciliation at the community level, in close cooperation with the Government and other concerned actors. In Sri Lanka, UNHCR continues to lead the collective humanitarian response to the unfolding crisis. Irregular humanitarian access and unpredictable security conditions represent major challenges for UNHCR and its partners in their efforts to provide emergency relief and protection for over 200,000 newly displaced persons. In Myanmar, UNHCR has secured limited access to communities affected by displacement in three provinces in the south-east of the country where it is carrying out Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in over 300 villages.

In Nepal, UNHCR is part of a collaborative United Nations effort to support return movements of IDPs in agreement with all parties concerned. Workshops promoting dialogue and raising awareness of IDP-related protection principles are conducted by UNHCR and its partners in selected areas of return.

In Afghanistan, UNHCR has supported government-led efforts to address the needs of the remaining IDP population which was displaced from the north following the fall of the Taliban, as well as responding, through the same channel, to new conflict-related displacement during 2006.

Protecting refugees within broader migration movements

Throughout Asia, UNHCR is trying to achieve the insertion of migration and refugee policy concerns in development, aid and investment policies. Through its increased participation in various regional forums (such as the Bali Process and the Asia-Pacific Consultations), UNHCR also aims to assist governments in addressing legitimate migration and security concerns through the development of policies which do not adversely affect the right of people with a well-founded fear of persecution to access physical safety and protection.

Mobilizing development actors in returnee-impacted areas

In Sri Lanka, the conclusion of a tripartite agreement between the World Bank, the Government and UNHCR has facilitated the relocation of thousands of families who were displaced in events prior to 2006. In northern Rakhine State in Myanmar, UNHCR is actively involved in mobilizing development actors, notably UNICEF, as well as WFP, with whom a joint plan of action has been adopted.

Part C: Specific topics

Tsunami response

The Indonesian Government Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias (BRR) has taken over the implementation of the remaining construction work in the province of Aceh which is to be completed in the course of 2007.

Pakistan Earthquake

In Pakistan, the Office successfully completed its intervention for the earthquake programme at the end of December 2006. The Government and key stakeholders have progressively assumed responsibility for the provision of basic services to the remaining camp population and the upgrading of shelters for the winter. Remaining funds will be used to assist the Government in preparing a post-winter return and reintegration strategy for landless people.

UNHCR

26 February 2007