

Foreword by the High Commissioner

As the agency mandated to protect and care for refugees and other displaced populations around the world, UNHCR operates in a complex environment that poses growing challenges to the help we provide to millions of people in need. Today, the problems that we and other humanitarian agencies work to address - persecution, flight, life-threatening conditions - are increasingly confused with issues like migration, terrorism and insecurity. The result is a dangerous misperception about what causes people to leave their homes and what enables them to go back. Our mission must be to defend the principle of asylum for those who need it while securing their right and ability to return.

A first challenge is posed by the rise of intolerance in modern societies. Rational debate in many countries is under assault from politicians and media outlets who feed intolerance by blaming society's ills on those from elsewhere. Intolerance for the "other" has become a populist rallying cry and, for many, a refugee has become a migrant or a security threat. Paradoxically, the rise of intolerance and populism is taking place at a time when the number of those seeking asylum is at its lowest level in almost a quarter of a century.

Protection activities must incorporate measures against fraud and abuse to safeguard the credibility of the asylum system. At the same time, UNHCR needs to confront the notion that refugees and asylum-seekers are the agents of insecurity and terrorism, rather than their victims. This will involve sustained advocacy and timely protection interventions, both of which I have made priorities for my Office in 2006.

Preserving asylum requires that we be able to find those in genuine need of protection when they are concealed by complex migration flows. The challenge of identifying such individuals grows with their numbers and the risks they are willing to take, as we have seen in the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Aden. It is impossible when mixed groups are not allowed physical access to asylum procedures or refugee status determination. UNHCR will work closely with governments over the coming year to support their efforts to improve registration and individual screening.

A third challenge is the lack of an effective link between emergency relief and development. This is a long-standing problem but one that seriously handicaps our efforts to implement truly durable solutions for refugees and other people of our concern. As long as peace and economic recovery have not taken root in a post-conflict situation, the sustainability of population returns is in doubt.

To address this gap, UNHCR is working with development actors to ensure that people of our concern are included in national development planning exercises. In Afghanistan, Liberia, Sudan and Somalia, for example, durable solutions for refugees and other displaced persons are an integral part of the recovery strategies jointly promoted by the UN Development Group and the World Bank. And we are collaborating with UNDP and other partners to help people of our concern become more productive and self-reliant during their displacement and after their return.

In September 2005, the UN family took a significant step towards addressing situations of internal displacement when the Inter-Agency Standing Committee decided in principle on a clear delineation of responsibilities within the collaborative approach. UNHCR was tasked to lead the response in the areas of protection, camp coordination and management, and emergency shelter. Our involvement with internally displaced persons will depend on two conditions, namely that affected populations maintain the right to seek and enjoy asylum, and that funds for the internally displaced are not diverted from our core refugee activities. The new arrangement is to be implemented in 2006 and the Office is fully committed to supporting it.

Increased involvement with internal displacement underscores the need for a robust emergency response capacity. We have set an operational goal of being capable, by the end of 2006, of responding quickly and effectively to unexpected situations involving movements of up to 500,000 people.



Sudan: High Commissioner António Guterres with internally displaced children at Riyadh camp in western Darfur. UNHCR / H.Caux

A priority in 2006 will be to maintain the financial stability UNHCR has achieved in recent years. Predictable funding is critical to avoid programming measures late in the year that invariably have a direct and negative impact on the people in our care. This year's Annual Budget is larger than that of 2005, which reflects mainly the inclusion of our special programmes in Burundi and Chad, but we have been and will continue to be rigorous in prioritizing activities and containing expenditures.

I use this opportunity to thank the donors we rely on each year and say how essential it is that they maintain their support. One of my longer-term objectives is to enlarge our funding base with new country donors and by putting more emphasis on private and corporate funding.

As I look forward to my first full year as High Commissioner, I am committed to an organization that demonstrates vision and delivers results. We have begun a reform of structures and procedures that will help bring more effective protection and support to the people we care for. The addition of the post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, the mainstreaming of Convention Plus and the creation of a resettlement service are important moves in this direction.

We have used the Global Strategic Objectives for 2006 to establish measurable targets in operations, protection and management. We cannot tolerate the levels of malnutrition or access to HIV/AIDS educational material that exist in many camp situations, for example, or that an operation does not have procedures in place to respond to sexual and gender-based violence. We have identified these and other specific areas as absolute priorities for 2006 and I have asked managers to focus their attention and resource allocation here. Clear targets mean greater accountability both for us and the donor community.

I am committed also to establishing a results-based management system with clear objectives and an organization-wide accountability framework. We have introduced a number of related elements already and will implement more, along with actions to ensure a culture of transparency. Steps have been taken to guarantee the independence of the Inspector General's Office, which will be further strengthened in 2006.

This Global Appeal sets out our priorities for the coming year. It is important to reassert that UNHCR, above all, works to protect the institution of asylum and refugees' right to a place they can call home. Meeting that challenge will make a lasting difference in the lives of millions of people.

I thank you for your continued financial support.

António Guterres