

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

FOLLOW-UP TO THE CIS CONFERENCE

The Context

UNHCR continued to carry out international activities to follow-up the CIS Conference of 1996, in accordance with the Conference's Programme of Action, relevant annual resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the conclusions of the Executive Committee.

Main Objectives and Activities

Promote a comprehensive approach to managing the problems of refugees, other displaced persons and returnees in the countries of the CIS; promote communication and co-operation among concerned governments, intergovernmental bodies and NGOs, with the aim of finding durable solutions to displacement problems in the region and hence to build refugee and migration management systems compatible with international standards; support the involvement of NGOs in the follow-up process and promote co-operation among them and with the relevant governments; monitor the implementation of the Programme of Action, in co-operation with IOM and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Achievements and Impact

As the CIS follow-up process is a multilateral effort, it continued to involve a series of inter-agency consultations among UNHCR, IOM and the OSCE and with the governments concerned, including outreach missions and the "Friends of UNHCR" mechanism. The priority was to evaluate progress and discuss possible activities after the completion of CIS follow-up in 2000, as envisaged in the Programme of Action.

The annual meeting of the Steering Group in June was well attended (43 States and 87 NGOs), and expressed qualified satisfaction with progress to date. The group came to a broad consensus that the consultative and networking mechanism should continue in some form when the formal follow-up ends. The meeting recommended the establishment of a Working Group to summarise accomplishments, identify priorities and sketch out the overall direction of future activities. It

was also tasked to recommend any specific further follow-up activities at the final meeting of the Steering Group in 2000.

At the NGO consultation preceding the Steering Group, several participants urged the international community to continue to support the fledgling NGO sector in the CIS countries, through networking, working groups concentrating on key themes, training and technical support. Further financial assistance was deemed essential to enable NGOs to play an effective role in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Three sub-regional meetings on NGO legislation were organised in the CIS in 1998-1999, in co-operation with the Council of Europe and other relevant organisations. The process culminated in the third sub-regional conference, held at the Council of Europe in January 1999, with the participation of governmental and non-governmental representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Follow-up mechanisms were developed to support the establishment of appropriate legal frameworks and tax regimes for non-profit organisations. These mechanisms entail the provision of expertise by the Council of Europe to those countries requesting it and regular meetings at the regional level to assess progress.

UNHCR also produced a number of publications on NGO-sector issues, including the Russian version of the NGO Handbook of International and Regional Legal Instruments on Refugees and Human Rights, a Directory of NGOs Working on Issues of Displacement in the Countries of the CIS, and a Catalogue of Capacity-Building Resources for NGOs in the Countries of the CIS.

To further support the development by UNHCR field offices of detailed country strategies for NGO co-operation and capacity-building, workshops were held in 1998-1999 for UNHCR staff and international and national implementing partners in co-operation with the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC). The workshops provided practical tools

for developing co-operation frameworks, assessing organisational strengths and weaknesses and quantifying the impact of capacity-building interventions. The last in the series of four workshops was held in February 1999 in Azerbaijan, with the participation of staff from UNHCR offices in the Republic of Moldova and Kazakhstan. The workshop reports contain an assessment of current approaches and recommendations for the future.

UNHCR continued to support NGO coalition-building and the transfer of skills between international and local NGOs on issues related to involuntary displacement in the CIS countries. This took the form of technical and financial support for the four NGO working groups covering the entire CIS. UNHCR took part in continued international efforts to find durable solutions for the Meskhetians. Informal consultations on this issue were co-organised and co-sponsored by UNHCR, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Open Society Institute's Forced Migration Project (Vienna, March 1999).

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Follow-up activities in 1999 contributed further to the implementation of the Programme of Action and, in particular, to the identification of main achievements and areas requiring further attention. The Working Group also considered the future of the CIS Conference process. Inter-agency co-operation has been further enhanced, notably between UNHCR, IOM, the OSCE and its institutions, as well as with the Council of Europe.

Governments in the CIS co-operated more closely with local NGOs. NGOs also further consolidated their own networks, especially through the CIS-wide NGO working groups. Efforts were made to start bringing the NGO Fund within UNHCR's mainstream operations and to merge NGO consultative mechanisms into the PARinAC framework. Plans were made to hold sub-regional PARinAC meetings in various CIS countries during the year 2000 and to facilitate the participation of NGOs from the CIS in the NGO consultations held prior to the annual plenary session of UNHCR's Executive Committee.

THE NGO FUND

The Context

The NGO Fund was established in 1997 as part of the Special Programme for the Commonwealth of Independent States to build NGO capacity at national level: to boost UNHCR's operational co-operation with local NGOs in the countries of the CIS; to help fund new issue-specific NGO networks; and to enhance participation of international and national NGOs in the follow-up to the 1996 CIS Conference.

Achievements and Impact

In 1999, the NGO Fund financed projects in all 12 countries of the CIS. While NGOs remained very dependent on international funding, there were encouraging improvements in commitment, independence and expertise. The programme helped to build co-operation among an increasing number of civil society players involved in refugee issues. The training and other support provided and funded by UNHCR served to build up expertise and experience of local partners and, hence, their credibility with governments, the general public and beneficiaries.

Armenia: In partnership with the Armenian Assembly of America's NGO Training Centre, UNHCR continued to implement a three-year programme to strengthen the institutional capacities of 14 national NGOs. This included training on ways to tap new sources of funds. Four other national NGOs were funded to implement several projects, including the extension of social services to elderly refugees, and the provision of information and advice on the acquisition of citizenship.

Azerbaijan: Six national NGOs received funding for the distribution of relief items, education, instruction on children's rights, the organisation of cultural events, beautification of public areas, community development, and social surveys.

Belarus: UNHCR trained seven NGOs, giving them the expertise needed to protect and assist refugees. The Belarusian Medical Workers' Movement opened the Refugee Counselling Service's second office and took preventive measures to counter tuberculosis among Afghan refugees. The NGO Training and Resource Centre, known as United Way Belarus, conducted counselling and training on issues related to refugee work: organisational development, legal regulations for NGOs, proposal writing, personnel management, financial management, and NGO taxation.

It published six manuals on issues of direct relevance to local NGOs. Funding and support were given to three NGOs which provided educational and community services for refugees. The country's social and community services' network was strengthened by technical assistance and training for the Red Cross Committees in Minsk and the six provinces. The Centre for Social Innovation was supported to establish an information centre dealing with integration issues, and to study how refugees fare in the labour market.

Georgia: Five national NGOs received support and training, took on responsibility for implementing small UNHCR projects. One of these five agencies helped to mobilise the local community in South Ossetia to participate in the rehabilitation of community facilities. Another distributed relief items in Abkhazia. A third implemented a Group Loan Programme for self-employed displaced women (while receiving advice and training from one international NGO). Another agency provided free legal advice in court and published the court's rulings for the benefit of refugees and IDPs.

Republic of Moldova: Five national NGOs were supported. Their activities included: publishing a monthly newsletter; organising a summer camp for refugee and IDP children; defending refugees and IDPs in court; distributing emergency relief items to vulnerable refugees; and setting up a charitable centre for refugees in premises made available by the municipality of Chisinau.

Kazakhstan: Three NGOs were assisted. The Children's Fund of Kazakhstan gave assistance in kind, on behalf of UNHCR, to vulnerable refugee children, and organised language classes. The International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law was assisted in organising six seminars on human rights and refugee protection in different parts of the country. Finally, Counterpart Consortium provided guidance on capacity-building to the NGO community in Astana, the new capital.

Kyrgyzstan: Five NGOs received assistance to provide tuition for Afghan and Tajik refugee children, to promote lessons on tolerance and conflict-resolution in state schools, and to make administrative and other organisational improvements.

Russian Federation: In total 25 NGOs in 17 regions benefited from UNHCR funding. Small one-off grants were given to 17 NGOs for structural and organisational improvement, and eight NGOs received funds for operational activities. An innovative joint training pro-

gramme for state implementing partners and NGOs was well received. With UNHCR's support, extensive capacity-building activities resulted in substantial progress by NGOs which have become partners for UNHCR and, increasingly, for the authorities, particularly at the local level bringing tangible benefits to persons of concern to UNHCR.

Tajikistan: An umbrella organisation, funded by UNHCR, organised training courses and seminars for the promotion of local NGOs in areas such as management, project design and implementation, resource identification, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, relations with the media, peace and tolerance education and conflict resolution.

Turkmenistan: Five newly created NGOs were helped to begin to consolidate their activities in the country. Although official ambivalence towards them is likely to persist for some time, local NGOs were granted exit visas to attend international conferences and seminars, affording them greater experience and the opportunity to build a network of professional contacts.

Ukraine: Five NGOs received seed grants to start up networks of lawyers in five regions of the country. Another NGO, based in Kiev, set up a lawyers' network covering most of the country. Through the umbrella NGO known as Counterpart Creative Centre, ten local NGOs received seed grants for developing and delivering social, educational and assistance programmes for refugees in different parts of the country. These included sports programmes for children, vocational training, social rehabilitation for women, publications, mother tongue education, support for voluntary repatriation, issues related to citizenship, and counselling.

Uzbekistan: UNHCR channelled support through two NGOs. Through Counterpart Consortium, three regional NGO Support Centres extended technical support to local NGOs, responded to some 200 consultations, printed a monthly newsletter, organised 37 training sessions gathering 400 participants, and developed contacts with organisations such as OSCE. The Association for Research on Citizenship organised seminars on international versus national criminal law, on the legal aspects of migration and citizenship in the CIS, and on the contribution of ethnic minorities in establishing democratic society in Uzbekistan. These were attended by academics, government officials, parliamentarians, judges, OSCE and NGO representatives and other participants. UNHCR also supported research and editorial work on five publications on citizenship.

UNHCR also supported four international NGOs that facilitate the activities of the CIS-wide NGO working groups. Working groups set up in 1997 continued to co-ordinate NGO participation in the follow-up to the CIS Conference in the following areas:

- Refugee Law and Protection (facilitator: Danish Refugee Council)
- Repatriation, Resettlement and Integration (facilitator: Counterpart International)
- Humanitarian/Emergency Assistance (facilitator: Norwegian Refugee Council)
- Conflict Management (facilitator: International Alert)

In July 1999, a fifth working group was set up - on Formerly Deported Peoples (FDPs). The group, composed of NGOs and representatives of FDPs, held two meetings to set its objectives and determine its composition. However, no facilitating agency could be identified to lead this working group and the continuation of its activities is under debate.

Concerted efforts were made to incorporate the NGO follow-up into UNHCR's existing NGO consultative

mechanisms. Beginning in 2000, activities funded from the NGO Fund will be dovetailed into individual country programmes.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

In all countries of the CIS, the NGO Fund has contributed to broader day-to-day operational co-operation between UNHCR and local NGOs, by enabling them to receive training, resources and experience. Through the NGO Fund, small grants have been given to newly created NGOs, in order to gradually put in place a local and regional network of implementing partners. At the regional level, the NGO working groups have served as a useful mechanism to give local NGOs the skills and expertise needed for advocacy, especially on behalf of refugees, in national and international forums, and to participate in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the CIS Conference. The NGO working groups have facilitated the transfer of skills between international and local NGOs; regional and joint activities; the exchange of information among NGOs from all the CIS countries; and the consolidation and co-ordination of NGO involvement in the follow-up of the CIS Conference.

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	AMOUNT
Armenia	62,049
Azerbaijan	50,000
Belarus	122,356
Georgia	44,430
Kazakhstan	58,998
Kyrgyzstan	60,381
The Russian Federation	170,184
Tajikistan	40,000
Turkmenistan	42,600
Ukraine	163,667
Uzbekistan	48,587
International Activities Programme Delivery*	496,151 377,275
Sub - Total Operational	1,736,678
Unliquidated Obligations	12,337
TOTAL	1,749,015

*Includes costs at Headquarters