

The High Commissioner's Forum
Opening Statement
By Mr. Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
(12 March 2004)

Convention Plus is about getting more commitments from States to enhance burden sharing and realize more durable solutions.

We did not overburden you with documents. You have received the following:

- Provisional Annotated Order of Business
- Progress Report: Convention Plus
- Convention Plus: Targeting Development Assistance to achieve Durable Solutions for Refugees.

Allow me at the outset to explain the structure of our work. Work is progressing on the three generic strands: resettlement, addressing irregular secondary movements and targeting development assistance to achieve durable solutions. While over the past year our efforts have largely focused on the generic strands, we are now shifting our focus to implementation.

Why? Key here is that understandings and commitments of States have to be translated into action if they are to result in more durable solutions and more effective burden sharing. If not, generic understandings are useless. Therefore, the aim is to use these understandings and commitments in multilateral agreements that address specific caseloads, including through comprehensive plans of action (CPAs).

The work on generic agreements focuses on strengthening protection and widening opportunities for durable solutions including through the more strategic use of resettlement, the targeting of development assistance, enhancing protection capacities in asylum countries and clearly articulating State responsibilities in secondary flow situations.

Strengthening protection capacities in first asylum countries and/or expanding opportunities for durable solutions, such as through self-reliance, repatriation and enhanced resettlement, contribute positively to reduce the need for refugees to move onward. At the same time, this provides much-needed support to refugees and host countries alike.

Similarly, a committed effort to resettle a sizeable number of refugees from States hosting large numbers of refugees for protracted periods may lead to greater ability and willingness to continue to protect and find other durable solutions for those refugees who remain.

Moreover, when repatriation operations are supported and pursued in parallel with the provision of other durable solutions for refugees, international solidarity and burden sharing for the benefit of refugees is a tangible outcome.

I have asked the Assistant High Commissioner, Mr. Kamal Morjane, under item 4 of our agenda today to elaborate on how the Office is making these linkages in situations where opportunities exist to do so and with a view to identifying concrete opportunities for Convention Plus approaches. The Assistant High Commissioner is best placed to provide this overview because

concluding caseload-specific multilateral agreements, including CPAs, rests with the Regional Bureaux, which are under his supervision. You may recall the background document provided to the Forum last June that set out a number of initiatives that could benefit from Convention Plus. I believe that it is worth exploring these and others, including Bhutan/Nepal, Colombia and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

As we will take up these issues under agenda item 4, I would like to report now on some progress in other areas.

The European Commission and a number of European Union Member States have supported a series of projects. They will provide seed money for specific efforts, in particular to support gaps analysis in several countries in Africa and preparatory activities for a comprehensive plan of action for Somali refugees.

The Convention Plus Unit as well as the Department of International Protection were instrumental in putting these proposals on the table and now that they have received the support of the European Commission and a number of European Union Member States, it is up to UNHCR's Regional Bureaux and country Representatives to implement them. The success of these efforts will depend on the involvement of the countries themselves: on the ground and in close cooperation with donor states.

The particular effort to achieve more durable solutions for Somalis is well underway. It is gratifying to see the extent of support for this from all quarters. We are putting in place the building blocks for a comprehensive plan of action. Within this context, Switzerland and South Africa, as you will later hear, have taken the initiative to propose a survey on secondary flows of Somali asylum-seekers. This initiative requires broader support. There are other efforts relating to Somalis. Hence, a Headquarters group will ensure that the different Somali efforts will develop into one comprehensive plan of action. It is at the same time key that Representatives in the relevant countries sit down regularly with the ambassadors of governments involved and also of the donor countries. This is all about building confidence and co-ownership.

But it is not just in regard to Somali refugees that we are actively pursuing durable solutions for refugees in Africa.

Last Monday, we had here a very successful African Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration. There, I explained the role of Convention Plus in seizing opportunities for durable solutions and in doing so through enhanced burden sharing. Fully realizing the potential and actual durable solutions in Africa today will mean achieving more development in Africa and reducing the risk of conflicts recurring. Multilateral support to address protection and assistance gaps in Africa is also a tangible form of burden sharing.

That very successful day was concluded with a commitment for effective follow up. We promised ourselves a high-level working group which, de facto, has to be a group of friends to support the process. Here we will see in practice that effective burden sharing and implementing the Framework for Durable Solutions requires commitments from States. It is not about nice words and intentions. It is about real and sustained contributions. This is what I mean when I just spoke about specific practical approaches and caseloads.

The Framework for Durable Solutions has proven to be an important instrument not only for UNHCR programmes but also for the UN family. In particular, a special working group of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) is in the process of incorporating it into the

guidelines on the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). Finally, the UN family and hopefully also the IASC are beginning to bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and development.

The Framework for Durable Solutions will also be an important tool for implementing comprehensive plans of action envisaged under Convention Plus. It is the methodology for implementing durable solutions on the ground.

Convention Plus, however, encompasses a broader spectrum of activities than just those envisaged under the Framework. It includes expanding resettlement opportunities, ensuring effective protection in countries of asylum and protection-sensitive methods to address irregular secondary flows. It is important to address the deficit in registration by providing incentives for asylum-seekers to retain and for States to provide travel and identity documents. Border controls alone will not suffice to reduce irregular flows.

These are all important aspects that will be addressed in the frameworks of understandings and commitments that you will hear more about today.

Within UNHCR, the registration initiative is developing well thanks to the good work of the Project Profile team. But this is only the beginning. States have to commit to understandings on how to handle undocumented flows.

On resettlement, our efforts are being strengthened both in terms of quantity and quality. This is partly as a result of the Multilateral Framework of Undertakings, but also the work of the Resettlement Section in improving UNHCR's resettlement performance and the initiative to identify groups for resettlement processing.

The targeting of development assistance to achieve durable solutions is also making good progress and we will follow-up with a multilateral framework of undertakings. This will build on the commitments made in Monterey as well as the promises of the G8 and the ambitions of the EU. The partnership with the OECD and the DAC has begun. The development value of community-based projects both in host countries and in areas of return is moving forward and is now better understood by our partners. These are all important aspects which the framework of understandings and commitments will need to take into account. As you can see, there is still a lot to do, but we are on the right track.

I would also like to highlight the relevance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to our work. The MDGs centre on promoting human development, which includes refugees and other uprooted people, meeting measurable standards of progress and doing so in global partnership. These are clearly connected to our protection and durable solutions activities. Like the MDGs, which focus on outcomes, UNHCR operations and Convention Plus activities are dedicated to achieving tangible progress and outcome.

Therefore, the eighth goal of the MDGs, which calls for a global partnership for development, is in line with the Convention Plus process since it promotes the contributions of refugees to development and the targeting of a fair share of development assistance to refugees and refugee-hosting communities. The MDGs establish yardsticks for measuring results. In this regard, the recently published "*Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations*", provides UNHCR operations with quantifiable and universal standards and indicators, whose consistent use will enable us to measure the well-being of those we assist and

quantify progress. So we are part of the MDG process and the people of our concern will contribute to development and sustainable peace.

Convention Plus is an initiative that is mobilizing and orienting UNHCR as a whole and supporting States. Many units and efforts are contributing to this, such as our Registration Unit, our Resettlement Section, our partnership with NEPAD and the African Union, and also our partnership with the European Union in the context of shaping the so-called European Prong and the follow-up to the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit. It is clear that these partnerships are enriched by the Convention Plus initiative and strategy. Each of these efforts is oriented towards burden sharing, supporting broader efforts to achieve peace, and making durable solutions for refugees sustainable.

In that sense, the Convention Plus initiative is giving positive momentum to our efforts. It is key to the process, but the process goes beyond it. As we will hear from the Assistant High Commissioner, many specific efforts are the primary responsibility of the Regional Bureaux, States and ambassadors at national level. All of this to say that very practical efforts are being made everywhere, for example in Zambia and Uganda as well as the efforts in favour of Afghan returnees and refugees looking beyond the 2005 horizon.

I am looking forward to hearing your views on the progress of and next steps in the Convention Plus process.