

**CCME Conference**  
**“Towards the Common EU Resettlement Scheme – the Road Ahead”**  
**Stockholm, Sweden (25-28 August 2009)**

**Remarks by Erika Feller**  
**Assistant High Commissioner - Protection**

*The value of resettlement*

“Resettlement matters”! This was the simply expressed, closing sentiment of the NGO Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement co-chair which I can only endorse. It matters to the refugees to whom it offers a new future; it matters to the communities where they will build that future; it matters to the former host countries as a demonstrable gesture of burden-sharing; it matters to refugee protection more broadly for the protection space it helps to open up. UNHCR is fully committed to developing the potential of resettlement as a protection mechanism, as a strategic asylum tool and as a durable solution which enriches communities and strengthens cultural diversity and respect for human dignity. I wish to thank the organisers of this meeting for providing us with this timely opportunity to reflect together on Europe’s vision for resettlement and its contribution to achieving these objectives.

My presentation will focus on the challenges facing UNHCR in developing the potential of resettlement and what European countries and our NGO and community partners can best do to assist. We are interested to hear your reactions and how you would recommend we collectively move on the various issues.

First, a word on partnerships.

*Partnerships*

Resettlement is a process across a broad continuum of activities, from identification and referral, through selection and preparation for departure, to the actual move and the longer term integration. It would be impossible without the active cooperation of a considerable number of partners. IOM is a central one. NGOs, many of whom like CCME, ICMC and ECRE are represented here today, also have a vital role. In an interesting opening statement to the June Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, the British Refugee Council listed, I am sure not exhaustively, the kinds of contributions NGOs make to the success of any resettlement effort. These include support with identification and referral, as well as support to advocacy for resettlement. The *UNHCR-ECRE joint European advocacy statement on resettlement* of June 2008 has helped to bring better coherence and synergy to our collective efforts. In particular, NGOs help to ensure that refugees are not passive recipients, but active participants in the resettlement process through: providing a platform for refugees to have input

into the resettlement process and the dialogues around it and ensuring that programs are tailored to the beneficiaries as well as the receiving countries; through assisting in providing a supportive and welcoming environment for newly arriving refugees, and through implementing integration programs whose ownership lies with the beneficiaries themselves.

Resettlement is an abstract notion without the strong support of the states themselves. There are currently some 24 countries which in one way or another participate in the resettlement process on an increasingly regular basis. The Nordic countries have helped to lead the way here, together with the US, Canada and Australia. It is a pleasure, in the presence of the Minister, to acknowledge the significant contribution of our Conference host, Sweden, which counts among the original so-called “traditional” resettlement countries, and which has consistently made places available to meet not only regular, but also emergency resettlement needs. There are other countries also represented today which are newer members of the resettlement fraternity. Germany has recently accepted over 2000 Iraqi refugees. Romania is both a new resettlement country, and among the first to partner with us in setting up a temporary evacuation facility for resettlement groups. We thank the Romanian Government, together with the Governments of the Czech and of the Slovak Republics, for having been ready to partner with us in this way. We hope to see more EU support for and indeed ownership of the ETC facilities. Other countries in Europe which have recently established resettlement programs or undertaken specific resettlement initiatives over the last few years include France, Portugal, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Spain, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland. Let me also mention in the most positive of terms our cooperation with the European Commission, whose active role in promoting an EU-wide resettlement scheme is welcomed by us.

So the interest on this Continent, matched by active programs, is growing. This development reflects very positively Europe’s embrace of the principle of burden-sharing.

The foregoing said, of course, the total resettlement places in the EU still represent less than 10 percent of the global resettlement capacity [in 2008 EU Member States collectively resettled around 4,378 refugees, or 6.7 percent of the global total of resettled refugees] which leaves much potential for EU Member States to do more.

The possibilities for a more coordinated effort have been well illustrated by the recent commitment at the EU level to the resettlement of 10,000 refugees from Iraq. Building on this experience, we see the value of an EU-wide resettlement scheme. In our view, it would strengthen coherence among the programs of Member States, and could strategically forward the meeting of priorities set according to global resettlement needs and comprehensive solution strategies. It should aim for complementarity with priority-setting at the multilateral level, and be structured to avoid creating another layer in the resettlement process. At its most basic, such a scheme should enable regular information exchange between Member States on quantitative targets

and provide one framework for building the capacity of new resettlement countries.

UNHCR supports a formalized role for NGOs in the scheme. Their expertise has significant potential to save Member States' resources and expand resettlement capacity, while being particularly important when it comes to developing public support for resettlement programs.

### *Challenges of resettlement*

This takes me from the successes and the promise in Europe, to the broader challenges.

Let me summarise them, and then selectively elaborate. The most glaring is the wide, probably unbridgeable gap between needs and available places. This leads to the challenge of prioritising among the many compelling needs, avoiding a situation where some groups are competed for and achieve "favoured status", while others are forgotten. How to ensure resettlement programs are needs-based, non-discriminatory and achieve successful integration outcomes is a current and serious preoccupation. At the policy level we often talk of the strategic use of resettlement. What this practically means and how to implement the notion needs clearer articulation. Making resettlement a working solution in protracted refugee situations is a real challenge.

That is a snapshot. Turning now to the issue of the numbers, UNHCR's identification and referral capacity has much improved, not least thanks to our partners. The more than 121,000 resettlement submissions and 65,800 departures in 2008 represented a 22 percent and 32 percent increase respectively compared to 2007. Good, but not good enough!! The problem is that our efforts to expand the reach of the resettlement solution are not being matched by a sufficient number of new and available places. The 2008 experience of UNHCR submitting refugees for resettlement (121,000 persons) over and above the available places offered by resettlement States (approx 79,000 places) is unprecedented and unsustainable without a corresponding increase in commitment from States to provide resettlement opportunities. We are now confronted by the question as to whether it makes sense for the Office to continue to refer beyond the capacity of countries to resettle. The global resettlement needs over the coming years could well be in the vicinity of some 747,000 persons. For 2010 alone, UNHCR estimates the resettlement needs to be about 200,000 persons; yet only some 79,000 places are likely to be available. We are reaching something of a crisis in numbers, with the global resettlement system at risk of "over-heating". We are already seeing backlogs and lengthy pipelines of pending cases, with all the frustrations, violence and onward movements this inevitably engenders.

There is probably no satisfactory solution to this problem. We will continue to work within and outside the EU to increase the number of available places and to build resettlement into comprehensive solutions strategies. We will also strongly advocate for prioritisation to be accorded to those most in

need, according to criteria which respect the reality that resettlement needs are not restricted to, or more pressing for particular groups, but that they cut across all religions, ethnicities, gender and age. We trust governments will not only understand this, but respond appropriately through programs in place, nationally and regionally, which add to the available number of places and which are coordinated with and complement global priorities. At a minimum, programs should strive for both greater flexibility, but also more predictability in program delivery.

Moving to the challenges of prioritisation, we are particularly urging states, in the face of a proliferation of protracted refugee situations, to engage in multi-year planning and to be flexible on resettlement admissions for long-term refugees in situations where they may have difficulty articulating a personalised 1951 Convention claim based on current events. Addressing protracted refugee situations is about finding solutions for refugees, which must take into account the particularities of people in long-term exile. Another priority is responding properly to emergencies. Within an annual program, it has to remain possible for Member States to adjust priorities so as to address urgent unforeseen needs.

A third priority, which will be discussed in some detail at the forthcoming and third High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, are solutions for refugees who are living in urban areas rather than camps. Resettlement can have an equally important role in an urban context as in other (e.g. camp) situations. This needs recognition both by host states and by the resettlement community. Of course managing equitable and effective resettlement in urban areas can be challenging, not least because refugees in urban settings can be difficult to identify, and the most vulnerable refugees are sometimes the least visible and vocal. The involvement of NGOs and other partners becomes vital in this regard. NGOs and other partners can assist UNHCR by strengthening outreach to refugees, serving as protection providers and in implementing projects in the area of medical assistance, social / legal counseling and support.

More generally, UNHCR counts on EU support to ensure that resettlement programs are needs-based and non-discriminatory. We are seeing a resurgence of greater selectivity by countries, focusing on persons deemed, against only vague criteria, to have "integration" potential. It is sobering to note that around 75 percent of available resettlement places cover just three refugee situations. At the risk of repetition, I reiterate that the credibility of resettlement efforts depends on programs being balanced according to global needs and priorities (including considerations of cultural, geographic and individual diversity) and on states removing restrictive criteria that undermine the foundation upon which resettlement is based.

Turning to the issue of resettlement as a strategic tool, resettlement can bring results going beyond the solution it offers to direct beneficiaries. While resettlement should not necessarily be made conditional on improvements in host states, certainly it can be linked to protection objectives such as improvement in detention conditions. Experience shows that resettlement

programs can open up more regularised access to refugee populations, provide alternatives to long term detention, lead to decongestion of camps, even their consolidation, and limit some demands on assistance programs. They can also contribute to a more open attitude in host states to self sufficiency options. Resettlement depends upon quality documentation of cases, and the registration arrangements it requires serve also to support more comprehensive solutions' planning. Arguably, as well, resettlement programs may help to reduce some of the push-pull dynamics of secondary movements, as well as movements between camps and urban settings. In countries of resettlement, well managed programs make a noted contribution to diluting xenophobia and fostering positive attitudes to government refugee programs.

Obviously numbers do matter when it comes to the leverage possibilities of resettlement. Numbers refers both to the places available and the total of countries involved in the effort. A sustained program over a multi-year period – as opposed to annually determined and implemented off-takes – has proved more interesting to host States.

The choice of the country in which to invest most resettlement resources is also an important factor in its strategic use. I take one topical example. An informal survey conducted in January 2009 of 290 Eritrean refugees who arrived in Malta in 2008 suggested that a high percentage of them apparently had previously registered as asylum-seekers in Sudan. The situation is probably similar with Somali arrivals. Using regular resettlement resources to address the resettlement needs in source regions would help to identify needy individuals at an earlier point in their journey, in countries dealing with large-scale and longstanding refugee situations, often without the means to offer sufficient protection. This could help to temper some of the incentives for onward movements, thereby reducing protection risks associated with them. It would also send important messages on burden-sharing to such host countries, like Sudan. EU countries who are not [yet] regular resettlers might step in to assist with the EU Relocation Initiative for Malta.

Resettlement and relocation both have their place in an overall burden-sharing framework. While, however, they are complementary processes, putting it rather bluntly, it is not helpful to confuse their purposes. What we would like to see is a commitment by EU Member States to resettle equal or more numbers of refugees from countries of first asylum and transit (e.g. Sudan and Libya, both of which receive large numbers of persons destined for Europe) as will benefit under the relocation initiative. Using places intended to be at the disposal of a globally-run effort in effect to solve intra-European concerns diminishes the external character of resettlement and thereby sends, in our view, a concerning message to host countries outside the Union. UNHCR urges European resettlement States to preserve existing resettlement quotas and to firewall these resettlement resources from any impact resulting from engagement in relocation efforts from Malta.

This being said, UNHCR recognizes the need for intra-EU responsibility sharing. The challenges facing states with “particular pressures” are not to

be underestimated. For these countries, in addition to intra-European relocation, there are other measures that would help, such as enabling greater freedom of movement within the EU for recognized refugees, a more flexible approach to Dublin II, and reinforcing the response capacities of states of arrival.

Finally a brief word on integration. Integration is what brings the refugee experience to a decent end. It requires investment and commitment which then pays dividends easing the process of adjustment and ensuring that the resettled persons become self-reliant and productive, rather than disaffected and dependent. The Tripartite Consultations this year debated integration at some length. There was interest in having more assessment of the ways refugees are received and supported to become full participants in their new communities. Family reunification was recognised as critical for successful integration, with there remaining an urgent need to harmonise the definition of family and to provide more flexible opportunities for families to be reunited. The consultations also placed weight on strengthening access to citizenship, which is a fundamental rights issue.

States were challenged to re-consider the adequacy of indicators traditionally used to determine the success of integration. The Consultations concluded that measurement needs to be much more evidence-based. The temptation has been to measure the easiest things, like employment, while more challenging, if equally important, are for example indicators such as civic participation. Building the integration capacity of receiving countries was recognised as ultimately more successful for integration than selecting against ill-defined notions of “integration potential”, not least when there are not yet in place effective measures either for this potential or for the success of the integration process in these countries. This said, there can be value in some repositioning of refugees more strategically in the migration programs of States. There may, for example, be the possibility of additional avenues – with the stress on the word “additional” – for third country resettlement of refugees because of their profiles.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I set myself several objectives in making this presentation. I was asked to offer some reflections on the character and role of resettlement as one of the three main solutions to refugee problems. I hope I have succeeded to bring out its versatility and the value of its strategic use, albeit that, for resettlement to succeed, all actors have to play their part committedly and with the necessary flexibility. Moreover, for resettlement to realise its potential and seriously constitute a durable solution, it has to be supported through there being an adequate number of places offered on as flexible as possible terms and it must be underpinned by a solid integration effort. These are some key messages I wanted to leave with you today.