



## **Non-Governmental Organizations**

### *Their role in the commemorations*

UNHCR cooperates closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and strongly values their support, advocacy and operational work. This cooperation will be particularly important as UNHCR prepares for a landmark year of anniversary events in 2011. This short Note provides some background on UNHCR's plans for these commemorations and sets out the role NGOs might play.

### **Overview**

Several significant anniversaries will take place in 2011. The core international legal instruments on refugee protection and the reduction of statelessness will enter their 60th and 50th years respectively, and 150 years will have passed since the birth of the first League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNHCR is planning a number of events in 2011 to commemorate these important anniversaries, with a particular focus on the refugee and statelessness conventions. These will take place both in Geneva and field locations, and are set out in the attached preliminary calendar of events. The culminating event will be a ministerial-level meeting, to be held in Geneva on 7 and 8 December 2011.

In addition to providing an opportunity for States to accede to the refugee and statelessness conventions and/or remove any reservations, this ministerial-level meeting will have two primary outcomes:

- **State pledges**, made by States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol and to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, as well as non-States Parties. These will enable States to identify issues and challenges that are of greatest importance to them, as well as realistic ways to respond. It is envisaged that States will make pledges individually and/or collectively. Their nature and subject matter will depend on the challenges being faced in particular national and regional contexts.
- A **ministerial communiqué** of States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol and to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. This will be a non-binding statement that synthesizes the main themes of discussions in the run-up to the ministerial-level meeting (drawing on expert meetings and roundtables, the 2010 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, etc.).

Throughout the commemorations, UNHCR will work towards three main goals:

- Strengthen the existing protection regime and promote a new protection dynamic. This could include exploring innovative ways to address protection gaps, including ways in which regional protection or cooperation

arrangements could most effectively be employed in parallel with national asylum systems;

- Attain greater support for the statelessness conventions, including new accessions, as well as better mapping of the statelessness problem and more effective ways to respond; and
- Raise public awareness and build solidarity with forcibly displaced and stateless persons, through a communications strategy aimed to influence public opinion and expand protection space. In so doing, it is hoped that new sources of funding can also be identified.

### **The role of NGOs**

NGOs will play an important role throughout the entire commemorations process, and UNHCR counts on their meaningful engagement and support. In particular, NGOs will be encouraged to participate actively in the 2010 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges and the 2011 NGO Consultations, and to take part in various meetings and conferences throughout 2011.

It is anticipated that NGOs will be invited to the ministerial-level meeting, in line with the precedent set at the first ministerial-level meeting in 2001. In addition, it is hoped that States will recognize the value of obtaining ideas and input from NGOs for the ministerial communiqué and State pledges.

The preparatory process for the pledges will be State-driven, facilitated by UNHCR and informed by persons of concern. NGOs could also support these preparations and increase awareness about the pledges process. For example, some States will undertake national consultations to identify topics for the pledges, which NGOs could assist with and provide input to. UNHCR will also organize consultations with refugee women and girls in six countries. NGOs could similarly provide support for these.

In general, the anticipated role of NGOs will depend on the nature and scope of their work:

- **NGOs working on specific, relevant thematic areas** could link their ongoing work to the goals and main themes of the commemorations. For example, NGOs working on gender equality issues may wish to take up the cause of eliminating gender discrimination in the passage of nationality from mothers to their children. NGOs working on economic, social and cultural rights could advocate for greater access to these rights for refugees and stateless persons. NGOs addressing racism and xenophobia issues may decide to link their work specifically to the plight of asylum-seekers and refugees. NGOs could also suggest topics and language for model pledges of commitment, which UNHCR will draft to assist States.
- **Regional NGO networks** could mobilize NGOs within their regions to contribute to the commemorations process. They could also help States and UNHCR to identify the principal protection challenges in their respective

regions, and suggest the type of pledges that could be made at national and/or regional levels.

- **National NGOs** could support the pledging process by encouraging States to make pledges and drawing their attention to possible areas in which these could most usefully be made. They could also assist UNHCR and States in undertaking consultations with persons of concern.

UNHCR looks forward to receiving further creative suggestions as to how NGOs could help to make these important commemorations a success.

UNHCR  
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