

*(Check against delivery)*

**Opening Statement by Mr. António Guterres**  
**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**  
**High Commissioner's Forum**

**Geneva, 17 November 2005**

Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome, all of you, to this meeting of the Forum entirely devoted to Convention Plus, at the exact moment it is mainstreamed into the core of UNHCR's activities.

Let us recall that Convention Plus was launched by my predecessor to find ways to meet new challenges. Growing challenges to refugee protection, in fact, that were not explicitly addressed by the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

Convention Plus is about finding more effective burden and responsibility sharing arrangements to attain durable solutions.

The word 'durable' is a cause of major concern for us. Let me be frank: Many of the voluntary repatriations we are carrying out today in various parts of the world may not be durable. Nobody can be sure they will last. Yes, we are doing our best to bring home people in dignity and security, giving them the bare essentials to begin their lives over. But our hearts are divided. We know at the same time that peace is fragile, jobs are scarce, education and health care limited, and infrastructure often just a theory.

We know also that many refugees today move in mixed migration flows. It is more and more difficult to bring effective protection to them. Smugglers too are trying to make a profit from asylum-seekers. And as we look for new ways to deliver protection it has become harder to get public opinion to recognize the need for it. Public opinion in many societies is increasingly led by fear and suspicion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It will come as no surprise to you who have been involved in the process when I say that the problems dealt with by Convention Plus are not solved. But I am convinced that the outcome of the discussions to date provides a solid basis on which to now mainstream the initiative.

The debate over the past two years has underscored the fact that engagement does not necessarily bring consensus. It is perfectly understandable that agreement has not been reached on all the strands. Some of these issues are, after all, at the core of the most intractable dilemmas faced by the international community. The number of these questions left open by various fora – the 2005 World Summit is a recent example – is

proof of that. It would be naïve to think we could resolve all of them in our framework.

We cannot be paralyzed by this. On the contrary, it is another reason to mainstream Convention Plus. Even with differences of opinion, there is now room to act. Cooperation is forged in action. The problems of refugees and other forcibly displaced people can only be addressed by working together, including with the communities themselves. This was at the heart of Convention Plus and remains crucial for tackling new and emerging challenges.

We will not put Convention Plus on the shelf. The commitments embodied in it will go forward. Convention Plus is simply too important to be treated as an appendix and must be fully integrated in the work of the Office. This means also that this range of activities should from now on be considered by UNHCR's regular governing body, the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee, as part of its normal programme of work.

At the same time, the commitment to multilateralism and collective engagement in tackling new and emerging problems must be maintained. This was at the heart of Convention Plus and remains a crucial goal in the next phase.

This is why I suggest we keep a forum alive for informal discussions on broader strategic issues. We will continue to face new challenges, many of which are linked to global concerns. There is a clear need to enhance the Office's capacity to look over the horizon, anticipate future trends and develop appropriate responses. An informal framework for frank and open discussions on this type of issue is extremely helpful.

Topics such as the asylum-migration nexus, obstacles to integration, and the prevention and response to situations of forced displacement are strong arguments for maintaining a forum for a different purpose, as a space for dialogue concentrating on strategic and forward-looking issues. On some occasions, the Executive Committee might decide to take the debate further as part of its regular programme of work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Convention Plus framework, the discussions have highlighted a number of areas where there are opportunities for innovative approaches and responses. These are positive outcomes which will help guide the development of activities and determine the most effective ways to resolving refugee problems.

We are giving higher priority to resettlement and will soon launch the Resettlement Service. The Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement will be used to shape this new emphasis.

UNHCR is aware of the risks associated with resettlement. Some argue that it might discourage voluntary repatriation or act as a pull factor in certain situations. This underscores the need to make more strategic use of resettlement, especially in protracted refugee situations, where there are no other solutions, and for groups which are particularly vulnerable or have genuine protection problems. Elevating the responsibility for resettlement within UNHCR will help to ensure this.

Allow me to express my gratitude here to Norway, as chair of the Working Group on Resettlement, for making strategic use of resettlement one of its priorities in 2006, working closely with UNHCR.

Our discussions on irregular secondary movement have underscored how migration is intertwined with the movement of those seeking protection. The underlying issues are complex and are part of what has been broadly referred to as the asylum-migration nexus.

It is understandable that the Core Group could not reach agreement on a Multilateral Framework of Understandings on such a multifaceted issue. At the same time, we cannot shy away from realities that are an integral part of the broader challenges of migration and development. Migration-related challenges have a direct impact on our work, as described in the recent report by the Global Commission on International Migration.

The work of the Core Group is timely and will inform the exchanges on appropriate responses to irregular migration that will take place in the coming year. I have requested the Director of the Department of International Protection to consider how we can build on the work of the Core Group, beginning with an expert round table in 2006. We have been an active member of the Geneva Migration Group and will cooperate in preparing the 2006 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I remain deeply committed to the 4Rs approach and am particularly grateful to those donor countries which are directing development aid to refugees. But if we are candid, we must acknowledge that transition from relief to development is just not working for the international community.

I welcome the broad recognition that more concerted attention needs to be given to incorporating refugees and their host communities in development planning and poverty reduction strategies. It is fundamental that countries include refugees, returnees and internally displaced in their own development plans. But for this to work it is essential that those development plans are supported by a minimum of institutional capacity and good governance, and that they are provided with additional resources.

Just as important, international humanitarian and development organizations must learn to work together. They must learn to overcome difficulties emerging from different cultures, timing and sense of urgency. UNHCR has begun discussions with UNDP to develop a new collaborative framework for durable solutions in Africa. This is a promising opportunity to enhance an essential partnership.

Even in donor countries there are cases where the link is absent, where different departments act with different strategies.

As I say often, UNHCR is not a development agency and we don't want to become one. We do not harbour the illusion that we can bridge the gap ourselves, even if in certain circumstances we will be forced to go beyond the essence of our mandate if we are to have the slightest chance of fulfilling it. But this gap must be bridged, and we all need to work together to find the solutions and in the needed advocacy for them to be implemented.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will hear more today about the application of Convention Plus approaches to field-related work. This must continue and will be supported by the structural changes we are making at Headquarters.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to the States who have partnered with us and will continue to work with us in advancing Convention Plus. I know how much time, resources and effort you have invested in this initiative over the last three years.

I am also grateful to everyone, not least those of you from the NGO community, who took an active part in giving shape to the initiative along the way.

I do believe Convention Plus makes a difference in the lives of refugees. That is our shared aim as we enter the next phase together.

Thank you.