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Update on UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) - 2011

A: Major challenges and new developments

Since violence erupted in Libya in February 2011, over a million migrants and refugees have fled to Egypt and Tunisia, and also to Algeria, Chad, Italy, Malta, Niger and Sudan. In addition, it is estimated that there are over 200,000 internally displaced persons in Libya. These large-scale population movements have caused a significant humanitarian burden for Libya's neighbours. At the request of the Governments of Egypt and Tunisia, which were facing some 15–20,000 people crossing the border each day at the height of the crisis, UNHCR mounted a relief effort within the first few weeks of the emergency. This included mobilizing staff and reinforcing offices in the region, airlifting tons of humanitarian assistance, establishing a camp at the Tunisian-Libyan border and joining IOM in evacuating third country nationals (TCNs). UNHCR chartered over 115 aircrafts and transported some 30,000 people. The Joint IOM/UNHCR Humanitarian Evacuation Cell has repatriated more than 145,000 TCNs.

By early September 2011, it was estimated that some 990,900 people had crossed the border from Libya to Tunisia since February 2011, including TCNs, Libyans and Tunisians. It is estimated that 77 per cent of the Libyans who crossed into Tunisia have now returned to Libya. UNHCR and its partners moved swiftly at the beginning of the crisis to establish a camp in Ras Jdir near the border to host TCNs. While the majority of TCNs have been assisted to return home, some 3,800 persons originating mainly from war-torn countries have requested asylum. By August 2011, the population in the camp comprised over 1,700 refugees and 2,100 asylum-seekers. Efforts are under way to promote resettlement for those who cannot return home. In addition to TCNs, the Government of Tunisia estimates that some 90,000 Libyans sought refuge on its territory between April and July 2011. The vast majority were accommodated by Tunisian host families, although UNHCR also set up a small camp in Tataouine to absorb the spillover. In support of the efforts made by the Tunisian Government and its people, UNHCR is implementing quick impact projects to minimize the burden on the host population and maximize absorption capacity in refugee-hosting areas.

Between February and the end of August 2011, over 468,000 people entered Egypt through Saloum, a small town close to the border, including Egyptians, Libyans and TCNs. To date, some 237,500 Libyans have returned to Libya. Over 15,000 Libyans who entered through Saloum are estimated to be still living in Egypt. At the beginning of the crisis, UNHCR established a presence in Saloum to address immediate needs. Many non-Libyan third country nationals were unable to enter Egypt owing to restrictions applied by the Government and remain in the border area. With the Government's permission, UNHCR erected rub-halls in the border area to be used as temporary shelter. Today, some 1,300 persons of concern to UNHCR, who cannot return home, remain at the border. As in Tunisia, UNHCR is carrying out protection and assistance activities including registration, refugee status determination and resettlement, as well as providing essential services, such as food, water, sanitation, health and special care for vulnerable people.

With the establishment of a presence in Benghazi and re-entry into Tripoli, access to refugees and other people of concern inside Libya is now easier. Prior to the outbreak of the conflict, UNHCR had registered over 8,000 refugees and 3,000 asylum seekers in the country. The Office is providing emergency financial assistance and counselling services to refugees and people of concern. It is also intensifying protection assessment initiatives and monitoring, population movement analysis and the distribution of non-food items (NFI) to IDPs.

Despite improvements in security in Iraq, the situation remains volatile. Some 1.3 million persons remain displaced throughout Iraq as of June 2011, with hundreds of thousands living in dire conditions. UNHCR is actively working with the Government of Iraq to tackle displacement through a comprehensive plan. While the number of Iraqi refugees is as high as 190,000 persons in the neighbouring host countries (Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic), the number of new arrivals has fallen from its peak of 15,000 to 2,000 persons per month. The focus of UNHCR's activities is gradually moving from neighbouring asylum countries to Iraq itself in order to facilitate conditions for voluntary returns.

In Yemen, displacement continued to spread to new areas such as Sana'a and Abyan. By August 2011, some 100,000 IDPs had been registered by the Government in Aden and some 1,000 refugee families were affected by the recent conflict. This is in addition to over 300,000 existing IDPs from Sa'ada Governorate in the north of the country, and some 600 families from Sa'ada who moved to Sana'a and Amran to escape the recent unrest in Sa'ada governorate. UNHCR and other partners have provided protection and assistance including shelter, NFIs, food, medical supplies and water and sanitation to the most needy. Despite the prolonged political instability in Yemen since the beginning of 2011, the number of new arrivals from the Horn of Africa to Yemen has doubled compared to the same period last year. By August 2011, some 60,000 new arrivals had reached the Yemeni coast. Some 75 per cent of these arrivals were Ethiopians and there was also a significant increase in the numbers of Somalis fleeing drought, famine, and insecurity.

After ten months of suspension following disagreement between the parties, the family visits that form part of the Confidence Building Measures (CBM) programme between the Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria and their relatives in the Western Sahara resumed on 7 January 2011. Following a CBM evaluation meeting held with the parties in February, which was also attended by the neighbouring countries, Algeria and Mauritania, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, a reconnaissance mission was conducted in April to assess the proposed routes for family visits by road. During the meeting it was agreed that UNHCR would work on simplifying preparations for future family visits and on improving its logistical capacity by exploring the possibility of hiring a larger aircraft. A cultural seminar for 34 participants from the refugee camps and from the Territory took place successfully in Madeira (Portugal) in September 2011.

B: Progress made and challenges encountered in achieving the Strategic Priorities

Several protracted situations in the region have been aggravated by worsening security conditions. These include some 1.3 million Iraqi displaced persons and more than 80,000 refugees to date in Yemen, with registration of new refugees ongoing. In Algeria, UNHCR has reoriented its programme for Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps, shifting its interventions from regular care and maintenance to more development-oriented activities, with increased support in key sectors, such as water, nutrition, health and education. Field offices have been established in all refugee camps.

Efforts to promote a favourable protection environment continue throughout the region. In Algeria, UNHCR will build on the momentum created by the Government's request for support in drafting a national asylum law and will assist with the establishment of efficient asylum/migration management structures.

Following unrest in recent months, Syrians who have fled the country for northern Lebanon continue to be assisted by the local Lebanese authorities with the support of UNHCR.

Discussions with the Government of Morocco are ongoing concerning the adoption of a national legal and institutional framework related to asylum. UNHCR continues to undertake capacity-building activities, including refugee law training for law-enforcement government officials, the judiciary and civil-society institutions.

In Mauritania, a working group has been developing a national strategy on asylum, including the drafting of a national asylum law for presentation to the Parliament in 2012.

In asylum countries receiving Iraqis, UNHCR has helped to maintain the protection space thanks to active engagement with the national authorities and to provide essential services and assistance to large numbers of refugees, while looking at ways to strengthen the sustainability of the collective refugee response.

New opportunities now exist in Libya for UNHCR to formalize its presence in the country and expand the protection space. While the situation remains volatile, the Office will nevertheless try to re-establish itself in key locations throughout the country with the overall aim of gaining access to refugees and asylum seekers, as well as to Libyans returning from neighbouring countries or still displaced inside Libya.

Durable solutions

As part of the response to the large-scale displacement from Libya, in April UNHCR launched its Global Resettlement Solidarity Initiative. This initiative calls upon States to consider providing resettlement places for non-Libyan refugees who have fled Libya and are hosted at the borders of Egypt and Tunisia, as well as for refugees in a protracted situation in urban centres in Egypt. Between March and mid September 2011, some 2,500 ex-Libya refugees have been submitted for resettlement from Tunisia and Egypt to a total of 12 resettlement countries. However, departures of the accepted cases remain slow, with only 397 persons having departed during the aforementioned period.

Significant progress has been achieved in reaching objectives for the Iraqi situation, including through advocacy, immediate interventions and work to support the identification and implementation of durable solutions for persons of concern in all population groups. The Iraqi Government's Comprehensive Plan represents the strategic policy of the Government of Iraq for the next four years, for addressing the needs of displaced people. The large-scale resettlement operation has continued to play a strategic role in providing durable solutions and offering some burden sharing, with a total of almost 130,000 Iraqi refugees having been submitted to resettlement countries between 2007 and August 2011 (including from Turkey). The highest number of submissions (53 per cent) is from the Syrian Arab Republic, however the pace and volume of resettlement processing has had to be reduced owing to staff reductions.

UNHCR is pursuing discussions with the Governments of Mauritania and Senegal on the resumption of voluntary repatriation for some 5,000 residual Mauritanian refugees in Senegal.

Statelessness

UNHCR welcomed the decision of the Syrian Arab Republic to grant citizenship to some of the stateless Kurd population through the adoption of Decree No. 49 in April 2011 and a draft law that would allow Syrian mothers to pass on their nationality to their children. In the Gulf region, UNHCR continues to meet with governmental and non-governmental bodies to discuss statelessness issues, and plans are in place to hold a symposium on statelessness in Kuwait in cooperation with UNDP, and a workshop on citizenship jointly with UNHCHR in Qatar.

Strategic partnerships

In Tunisia, since the beginning of the Libyan crisis, UNHCR has engaged more proactively with the Tunisian Government. The Office signed an Accord de Siège with

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 2011 and has been asked to facilitate the creation of a legal and institutional framework through intensified training and technical support. In the Gulf region, UNHCR has pursued capacity-building activities through workshops on refugee law and international protection, SGBV, human trafficking, and mixed migration. In addition, UNHCR has reinforced its newly established External Relations Hub in Abu Dhabi with the aim of strengthening and promoting partnerships with the governments and institutions in that region.

C: Financial information

UNHCR has revised its financial requirements to respond to the crisis in Libya from US\$ 80.6 million to \$110 million. This increase is the result of additional requirements for Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. The additional requirements also include the costs associated with UNHCR's refugee status determination and resettlement operations in Egypt and Tunisia, which have necessitated the deployment of a considerable number of staff.

The Iraq Situation Comprehensive Needs Budget for 2011 is \$409.2 million. As of the end of August 2011, UNHCR had received 50 per cent of the needs in contributions.

With the new displacement in Yemen as a result of the civil unrest and the security situation, additional funding is required. Current funding for the Yemen operation remains low.
