



## Leaving Libya

A review of UNHCR's  
emergency operation in  
Tunisia and Egypt,  
2011-2012

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## Executive summary

UNHCR's 2011 emergency operation in North Africa, which followed the outbreak of civil war in Libya, addressed one of the largest mixed migration crises that the organization has ever encountered. The unanticipated emergency generated a massive influx of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia and Egypt, two countries which themselves had only recently experienced major political upheavals. As a result of these considerations, little contingency planning had taken place.

In the first few weeks of the emergency, the majority of the new arrivals were third-country nationals, that is, citizens of neither Libya nor the countries to which they moved. Altogether, more than 120 nationalities were represented in the exodus, not to mention hundreds of thousands of Libyans who enjoyed de facto temporary protection on Egyptian and Tunisian soil, as well as access to public services.

Despite these challenging circumstances, within 72 hours of receiving requests for support from the Egyptian and Tunisian governments, UNHCR had sent appropriately skilled staff members to the field and initiated operational activities such as the pitching of 1,500 tents. The speed of this response, and its focus on the protection of the new arrivals, helped to prevent the crisis from becoming a humanitarian catastrophe. In this context, important contributions were also made by IOM, ICRC and the IFRC, as well as the people and institutions of the two countries concerned.

Sustaining this response did not prove easy. UNHCR's emergency staffing roster was already heavily drawn upon for emergencies elsewhere in the world, a factor complicated by the need for at least some of the people on the ground to have a knowledge of Arabic. In these circumstances, the organization was obliged to rely on many volunteers from other UNHCR operations in the region, as well external deployees. In total, around 290 individuals were deployed in the emergency operation.

While the team leaders mobilized by UNHCR were generally very effective, many of the more junior volunteer staff had little or no emergency experience, and their turnover was high (sometimes as little as one and a half months). UNHCR struggled to find deployees with appropriate skills in programme, administration and protection (with the exception of resettlement), while the organization had to rely on external expertise in technical areas such as water, sanitation, health and site planning. UNHCR had to rely on the expertise of other agencies with mixed results. At times, the ratio between regular UNHCR staff members and external deployees was excessively skewed towards the latter.

The border camps established in Tunisia and Egypt to accommodate the new arrivals presented UNHCR with the challenge of having to deal with a very diverse group of people in terms of both their nationality and their legal status. The migrant workers, asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and recognized refugees who took up residence in the camps had some common humanitarian needs, but their protection needs and ability to find durable solutions differed significantly. UNHCR's task was also complicated by the fact that the organization had no role in selecting the sites on which the camps were established.

In terms of material assistance, the lightweight emergency tents that were originally distributed to accommodate refugees and migrants in Tunisia were not suited to local conditions and quickly became unusable. UNHR subsequently distributed improved models. In both countries, low mortality and morbidity rates were recorded, due in large part to both the quality and quantity of assistance they received but also to the good health and nutritional status of the refugees and migrants upon arrival.

With respect to durable solutions, an initial focus was placed on the evacuation of third country nationals to their countries of origin, a task undertaken in close cooperation with IOM, as well as the resettlement of the much smaller number of refugees amongst the new arrivals. While the evacuation operation proceeded in a generally effective and efficient manner, the refugee resettlement programme proved to be more challenging. Particular difficulties were experienced in the areas of registration and refugee status determination, as well as the rigidity of the resettlement quotas offered by states outside the region.

In terms of inter-agency coordination, UNHCR's key partner was undoubtedly IOM. The early decision taken by the heads of both agencies to jointly implement the humanitarian evacuation programme was in many senses a high point of the whole operation. As well as enabling many thousands of third country nationals to return to their homes, the evacuation programme assisted UNHCR in its efforts to secure continued access to refugees and asylum seekers in both Egypt and Tunisia.

More generally, however, the evacuation and resettlement efforts undertaken by UNHCR and IOM do not appear to have expanded the protection space available to persons of concern in both countries. Indeed, important restrictions continue to be placed on the rights of such persons, while both Egypt and Tunisia remain opposed to the local integration of refugees on their territory. The future of those who have not been able to find a solution by means of resettlement consequently remains unclear.

In terms of lessons learned from the emergency operation in Egypt and Tunisia, the following are the most pertinent.

First, in future emergencies involving mixed populations that are accommodated in the same location, camps should be demarcated into different zones, so as to reduce the risk of tensions and conflict between different nationalities and ethnic groups.

Second, in future emergencies that entail resettlement as the primary durable solution, UNHCR should avoid frontloading resettlement capacity if commensurate registration and refugees status determination capacities are unavailable. Realistic time-frames are also required. While it is certainly possible to carry out resettlement in emergencies, the length of the process makes it very difficult to carry out large-scale resettlement on an emergency basis.

Third, UNHCR and its partners should not give host states the impression that speedy resettlement will be possible in the case of large and diverse groups of refugees and asylum seekers. Similarly, UNHCR should acknowledge that residual caseloads of refugees are likely to be left behind, and remind host states of the obligations that they have towards such people.

Fourth, to the extent possible, limit the numbers of junior, inexperienced and untrained volunteers deployed in emergencies and ensure that they are deployed in appropriate

proportion to numbers of more senior and experienced personnel. Emergency deployments should ideally be undertaken for a period of more than two months. Similarly, while there is an evident need for UNHCR to deploy seconded staff in emergencies, their numbers should be kept in balance with regular staff at the Branch, Sub and Field Office levels.

Fifth, when emergencies take place in countries with a small UNHCR office in the capital city, the organization should resist the temptation of deploying all of its emergency staff to the deep field, however great the operational demands being made upon the organization. If it is to maintain the required level of oversight and support to the field, then the Branch Office must also be strengthened.

Sixth, at the onset of emergencies, UNHCR should consider deploying multifunctional teams, with the dual task of assessing staffing gaps and coordinating an initial operational response in close cooperation with the established UNHCR presence.

Seventh, in large scale emergencies, experienced Administration and Human Resource Officers are essential to manage the regular arrival and turnover of both UNHCR staff members and external deployees.



## Introduction to the review

1. In February 2011, large numbers of people began to flee the violent struggle for control of Libya. While the majority were members of the country's large migrant worker population, refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR were also involved in the movement. The exodus from Libya placed a considerable burden on the neighbouring countries of Tunisia and Egypt, both of whom were trying to cope with the consequences of their own internal upheavals.
2. Responding to requests from both countries, UNHCR mounted an operation that involved the deployment of around 90 emergency personnel, the establishment of transit camps in Shousha (Tunisia) and Salloum (Egypt), as well as the delivery of hundreds of tons of relief supplies.
3. In close cooperation with IOM, UNHCR also launched a humanitarian evacuation programme that transported many thousands of third country nationals back to their place of origin. Following the demise of the Gaddafi regime in November 2011, the emergency in Egypt and Tunisia subsided, leaving UNHCR to find solutions for the relatively small number of foreign nationals who remained.
4. As the emergency operation drew to a close, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees requested PDES to undertake a review of the organization's experience in Egypt and Tunisia. The purpose of the evaluation is twofold: to analyse the effectiveness of UNHCR's response to the exodus from Libya and to identify lessons learned that can be employed to strengthen the organization's emergency response capacity.
5. The evaluation team consisted of two UNHCR staff members and an independent consultant with extensive experience of migration and humanitarian issues in North Africa. The evaluation team carried out a desk review of relevant documents and interviewed a wide range of key stakeholders in Geneva, Tunisia and Egypt in late 2011. Telephone interviews were also conducted with individuals who were not available for face-to-face meetings, including UNHCR staff in Libya.
6. The principal constraint encountered by the evaluation was the team's inability to travel to Libya because of the prevailing insecurity in that country. The review consequently focuses solely on UNHCR's activities in Egypt and Tunisia.
7. The current review was undertaken in accordance with UNHCR's evaluation policy. The evaluation team would like to thank all of the many people who contributed to the review, especially UNHCR staff in the field who greatly facilitated the evaluation process by ensuring access to key interlocutors and relevant information.



## The operational context

8. The period February to November 2011 witnessed a violent struggle for control of Libya, pitting the armed forces of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi against opposition groups who were provided with aerial support by a number of foreign powers. The intensity of the armed conflict provoked massive displacement within the country and across its borders.

9. Almost 800,000 people had left Libya by August 2011, a figure that had climbed to over one million by the end of the year. Around 80 per cent of these people moved to the neighbouring countries of Tunisia and Egypt. Some 45 per cent of those who fled from the country were 'third country nationals', people who originated neither from Libya nor from the country to which they had fled. Altogether, people of 120 different nationalities were involved in the exodus.

### **Migrants and refugees**

10. Most of the third country nationals who left Libya were migrant workers who had been employed in Libya and who were able to return to their countries of origin once the necessary transport arrangements had been put into place. In their midst, however, were to be found a significant number of people who were of concern to UNHCR: some who had been recognized as refugees in Libya or who had submitted asylum applications there, and others who could not return to their country of origin for protection-related reasons.

11. When the conflict erupted, there were almost 8,000 recognized refugees and just over 3,000 registered asylum seekers in Libya, most of them from sub-Saharan African countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. Such people had two very good reasons to leave Libya.

12. First, and as with all other residents of the country, they were threatened by the generalized armed conflict between the Gaddafi regime and its opponents - a war which claimed in the region of 30,000 lives and which left many more seriously injured. Second, people originating from sub-Saharan Africa were perceived by some of the rebel forces to be associated with the government in Tripoli, and were thus at risk of arrest, detention and even execution.

### **Egypt and Tunisia**

13. The operational environment confronting UNHCR in Egypt and Tunisia had a limited number of positive characteristics. North Africa is easily accessible from key humanitarian hubs in Europe and the Middle East, especially when compared to many crisis-affected areas in sub-Saharan Africa. The world's most prosperous states had a keen interest in both the political and humanitarian outcome of the Libya conflict, and were consequently ready to devote substantial resources to the region.

14. In other respects, however, the operational environment was a particularly difficult one. The rapid onset, large scale and mixed nature of the exodus from Libya confronted UNHCR and other humanitarian actors with some evident challenges.

15. This situation was seriously compounded by the fact that Egypt and Tunisia had both recently experienced their own political upheavals and lacked the capacity to respond to such a major emergency. In Tunisia these difficulties were mitigated to some extent by the relatively smooth nature of the political transition that had taken place and the appointment of a former UNHCR staff member to a senior position in the country's new government.

16. In Egypt, however, the outcome of the popular uprising against the Mubarak regime had been less clear cut, and the administration was in a state of transition. As a result, UNHCR encountered long delays in receiving authorization to undertake essential emergency activities, such as the establishment of a transit camp for new arrivals near the border with Libya.

### **The historical context**

17. The challenges confronting UNHCR in Egypt and Tunisia must also be seen in a historical context. The organization's role in both countries has always been a difficult one, first, because UNHCR has been obliged to assume full responsibility for almost every aspect of refugee protection and assistance; and second, because Egypt and Tunisia have traditionally been very reluctant to provide recognized refugees with access to public services and employment opportunities, let alone the option of local integration. While UNHCR has been able to find a durable solution for some refugees by means of resettlement to third countries, the number of resettlement places available in Egypt and Tunisia has never been equal to the need and demand for them.

18. The UNHCR offices in Egypt and Tunisia have also been beset with other problems. At the end of 2005, some 265 demonstrating refugees were killed by the Egyptian security forces near the UNHCR office in central Cairo, an event which had seriously negative consequences for the organization and its relationship with the refugee population. Since that time, and at the request of the government, the office has been relocated to a satellite city that is located a considerable distance from the areas where most of Cairo's estimated 110,000 refugees and asylum seekers reside.

19. In contrast with Egypt, where, as at January 2011 there were over 40,000 recognized refugees, UNHCR's operation in Tunisia has always been a very modest one. In January 2011, the number of registered refugees and asylum seekers in the country amounted to just 120 people. At that time, UNHCR still had no official agreement with respect to its presence in the country (a situation that has since been corrected) and operated from the UN Headquarters in Tunis.

20. Exacerbating the situation described above, UNHCR's operations in Egypt and Tunisia were constrained by the fact that the organization generally lacked experienced national and international implementing partners with emergency response experience. As a result, many activities had to be carried out directly by UNHCR, while those that were undertaken by partners were subject to limited oversight.

### **Simultaneous crises**

21. Any evaluation of UNHCR's response to the crisis in Egypt and Tunisia must also take account of the simultaneous demands being made on UNHCR and its humanitarian partners in other parts of the world.

22. In the second half of 2010, when the Tunisian people led the way in demanding political change in North Africa, UNHCR had to respond to an ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan, which displaced some 400,000 people. This was swiftly followed by the post-election political crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, which uprooted half a million people within the country and forced an additional 200,000 to seek protection abroad, particularly in Liberia.

23. Meanwhile, on the other side of the African continent, continued fighting in Somalia, coupled with a widespread drought, forced a quarter of a million people to flee the country during the first nine months of 2011, when crisis in Egypt and Tunisia was also at its peak.

24. Such manifestations of the world's current volatility pose an obvious question: how many major emergencies can UNHCR and its partners respond to at the same time, especially in a context where humanitarian funding seems certain to become increasingly scarce?



## Emergency preparedness and response

25. "Nobody saw it coming." That was the response of many UNHCR staff members and other humanitarian personnel when asked about the level of preparedness for the emergency in Egypt and Tunisia. Indeed, the Arab Spring as a whole had taken the international community by surprise, even amongst analysts and diplomats with extensive experience of the Middle East and North Africa region.

26. This was by no means a unique situation. According to a review undertaken by UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service, most of the major refugee and displacement crises of the past 12 years have either not been predicted at all or took a form that was substantially different from that envisaged in the contingency planning process.

27. In this respect, the Libya crisis confirms the wisdom of the IASC contingency planning guidelines, which underline the dangers of undertaking detailed planning and which stress the utility of establishing a dialogue with the authorities, international organizations and leading NGOs with respect to the broad division of labour in any emergency operation, irrespective of the particular form that the crisis might take.

### **Instability and capacity**

28. In the case of Egypt and Tunisia, the ability of UNHCR and its partners to undertake contingency planning was seriously compromised by the continued political instability in both countries. This was particularly the case in Cairo, where UNHCR was striving to meet the protection and assistance needs of the city's large refugee population, whose security and livelihoods had been seriously jeopardized by the country's ongoing political crisis.

29. In Tunisia, the absence of a contingency plan must also be interpreted in relation to the very limited capacity of the UNHCR office and the common perception, in the words of one staff member, "that nothing ever happens here." According to an IFRC manager who was in the country from the beginning of the influx, this perception was not confined to UNHCR. "The crisis was not anticipated," he observed. "In terms of humanitarian emergencies, Tunisia was a sleepy place."

30. While early warning and contingency planning was generally lacking in Egypt and Tunisia, the response evolved rapidly as the Libya conflict and exodus of foreign nationals escalated. The UN issued an Inter-Agency Regional Flash Appeal on 5 March 2011.

31. In the appeal, UNHCR requested \$9 million for emergency assistance to refugees in Libya, \$8.6 million for people fleeing to Tunisia, \$6.7 million for those moving to Egypt and a further \$6.7 million for movements to other parts of the region. In a subsequent revision of the appeal issued on 18 May 2011, the UNHCR component for Libya was reduced by more than a third while that for Egypt, Tunisia and other countries was more than doubled.

32. By the third week of March, just over a month after the onset of the Libya conflict, UNHCR produced planning documents for Egypt and Tunisia which envisaged a continuation of the influx and which were intended to be updated periodically as the situation on the ground unfolded. While they were not contingency plans in the strict sense

of the concept, as emergency response activities were already under way, these documents played a positive role in establishing UNHCR's leadership role and defining the responsibilities of its partners.

33. The hazards of early warning and contingency planning were underlined by the fact that an inter-agency contingency plan had indeed been established in Egypt prior to the influx from Libya. But it was designed to meet the demands of a very different scenario, namely the large-scale arrival of refugees from Sudan in the context of South Sudan's independence. Even so, UN officials in Cairo observed that the contingency planning process for Sudan had some value in terms of team-building and the allocation of responsibilities.

### **Emergency procedures**

34. Several previous UNHCR evaluations have drawn attention to the fact that the organization lacks a mechanism that enables an emergency to be formally declared, thereby triggering a set of special procedures that enable the organization to maximize the speed and effectiveness of its response. Indeed, the first proposal for the establishment of such a mechanism was made in 1992, following the first crisis in the Persian Gulf.

35. While that recommendation went unimplemented for two decades, the spate of recent emergencies referred to at the conclusion of the previous chapter have recently prompted action to be taken on this matter. Thus on 26 April 2012, the High Commissioner published a 'Guidance Note on Strengthening UNHCR's Emergency Policy and Procedures', stating that:

Reviews of UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response performance over recent years have identified a number of key gaps in its capacity, policy, tools and procedures when responding to emergencies.

36. To fill those gaps, the High Commissioner issued new instructions in response to six dimensions of UNHCR's emergency response arrangements, including that of "emergency response activation and internal coordination." The others addressed the issues of inter-agency partnership, information management, human resource management, emergency appeals and resource allocation.

37. The introduction of these new instructions represents a very welcome development in the ongoing effort to strengthen UNHCR emergency preparedness and response capacity, and their implementation should be closely monitored in any future emergency operations.

### **Human resource deployment**

38. On 25 February 2011, shortly after the Libya conflict commenced, the High Commissioner made an announcement on the issue of emergency deployments in North Africa. It appealed to all UNHCR personnel to make themselves available for the operation should they be requested to do so, as the organization's emergency roster had already been overstretched by emergencies elsewhere in the world.

39. This appeal met with a very positive response. According to one staff member in Tunisia, "within 72 hours of the beginning of the crisis we had emergency staff deployed on the ground and erecting tents in a camp at the border with Libya." While this positive

appraisal was echoed by many external stakeholders, human resource deployment could nevertheless have been more effective in several respects.

40. The most frequent comment made by personnel from UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in both Egypt and Tunisia was that staff deployment was very fast, but that turnover was too quick and affected too many positions within the operation. Moreover, the need for Arabic speakers meant that many staff members were seconded on a voluntary basis from other important operations in the MENA region, such as Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Yemen. Personal networks played an important role in this respect, with staff members being contacted by telephone rather than being mobilized through regular human resource management systems.

41. While this somewhat ad hoc approach was an understandable and in many respects effective one, it also came at the expense of knowledge and continuity. Particular doubts were expressed about the wisdom of deploying young staff members who had not worked before in emergencies. "We did not need colleagues who wanted to come here in order to gain experience", commented one seasoned national staff member.

42. Although this is an understandable sentiment, it does raise the issue of how UNHCR personnel can gain their first experience of working in an emergency. In this respect, a lesson learned from North Africa is that only a limited proportion of the staff members who are deployed in a crisis should arrive on the ground without previous emergency experience.

43. The level of staff turnover was also problematic. Out of the 289 UNHCR deployees to Egypt and Tunisia between February and November 2011, 64, particularly volunteers deployed by the MENA Bureau, remained less than two months, including 16 who stayed less than one month. Interviewees were unanimous in considering that this constituted an unwise practice.

44. At one point in both Egypt and Tunisia, the UNHCR offices felt that they had lost control of who was coming. "It was not always clear who authorized or requested some of the deployments," was a common observation. Hand-over notes from departing staff were very rare, adding to the problem of continuity. Such notes should be compulsory in emergency operations.

45. On a more positive note, members of the core team of senior emergency managers remained in the field for a minimum of three months, and their presence was considered by many to be fundamental to the overall effectiveness of UNHCR's emergency operation. One recommendation made by staff in the field was that the Career Management Support Section should profile existing personnel and identify those with relevant competencies, in case UNHCR has to deploy staff members who are not on the emergency roster.

46. Contrary to senior staff in key management positions, mid-level management in the operation (particularly in programme and administration) were generally assessed to be less effective, while technical staff (site planners, WASH specialists, nutritionists, etc.) were either non-existent or deployed late through external placement schemes. A particular area of weakness was that external deployees often lacked familiarity with UNHCR's complex software systems and other organizational procedures.

47. With respect to protection, UNHCR's emergency resettlement personnel were highly regarded - an important asset for the operation given the extent to which resettlement

became a central means of finding solutions for persons of concern. Other types of protection staff, such as Refugee Status Determination and Registration Officers generally arrived less quickly, a situation that affected the speed and quality of resettlement submissions. These staffing issues had the unwelcome consequence that in some cases, junior officers (internal or even external) were appointed as “reviewing officers” while senior staff were appointed as “case workers,” turning regular reporting lines upside down.

48. The need for large-scale RSD in the border areas of Tunisia and Egypt revealed a structural lack of UNHCR capacity in this area, which on 1 July 2011 prompted the senior management to issue an all-staff e-mail appealing for volunteers to be deployed in Tunisia. Up to that point, there had been an excessive reliance on external capacity (up to 40 per cent of all deployees), arranged through organizations such as the Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee and UN Volunteers). In Tunisia, 20 out of 38 RSD deployees were mobilized in this way, while in Egypt the ratio was eight out of 11.

49. Although many of these external deployees were very competent, they lacked the authority to take and implement decisions speedily. For one 20-day period in July 2011, all of the protection staff as well as the acting Head of Office in Salloum were drawn from this affiliate workforce, meaning that every case had to be referred back to Cairo for a final decision. The ratio of internal to external staff improved in subsequent months and stood at approximately 30 per cent by the end of October.

50. A specific problem affecting the operation was that the UNHCR office in Tunis was very small (only one international and four local staff members) and consequently lacked the capacity to monitor and supervise operational activities. Indeed, priority was given to field deployments, while the requirements of the Tunis office were neglected, particularly in terms of additional Programme and Administration officers (who arrived in the city only in September 2011).

51. The deployment of a Human Resource Officer in Tunis would also have been very useful, considering that there were over 100 UNHCR staff members on various types of contract, rotating in and out at high speed and in need of visas, contract renewals and other administrative formalities. One lesson learned from this experience is the need for UNHCR to deploy something akin to the IFRC’s ‘FACT’ Teams (Field Assessment and Coordination), that is multifunctional teams which provide a diagnosis of the emergency staffing gaps that need to be filled in the short and medium term, formulate a plan of action and facilitate and coordinate the start of relief activities.

52. Eventually a total of 16 posts were created in Tunisia. Staff were appointed under the Fast Track system at the end of July 2012, with most of them arriving in the field in September. The whole process, from the decision to create posts to the eventual deployment of staff on the ground, took more than four months. Had the request to create positions been made earlier and the Fast Track process been speedier, a considerable amount of money could have been saved, as the overwhelming majority of staff deployed to the emergency were on mission status.

53. The main difference between the staffing situation in Tunisia and Egypt was that the latter country had a much more robust staffing structure when the Libya crisis erupted. National staff were deployed very quickly to Salloum to deal with the initial phase of the emergency, and in April 2011 the Branch Office requested the creation of 15 posts in Salloum, to be filled under the Fast Track procedure. Contrary to Tunisia, the request was not accepted.

54. The evaluation team heard different interpretations of this refusal, including the hope that the operation was going to be over by the end of 2011, while Fast Track appointments are usually for a minimum of one year. It was also suggested that the establishment of such posts would have provided an unwelcome signal to the Egyptian government that the new arrivals were expected to remain in the country on a long-term basis. According to one estimate, the decision to make use of staff on mission and external deployments entailed some \$160,000 more in expenditure than the creation of Fast Track posts.

55. A specific issue affecting Egypt was the classification of Salloum as a category B Duty Station, the same as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where conditions are indescribably better. This anomalous classification was determined by the International Civil Service Commission, with the approval of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office.

56. In practice, however, this decision affected UNHCR staff most strongly, requiring them to live in extremely difficult circumstances. According to some reports, the ICSC officials who classified Salloum as category visited Marsa Matrouh, a tourist destination some 220 kilometres away, but only flew over Salloum! The classification was eventually changed by the ICSC from B to D on 1 January 2012.

### **Camp management and emergency relief**

57. In both Egypt and Tunisia, UNHCR had no real choice on the location of the camps that were established to accommodate the new arrivals from Libya. This had detrimental consequences for the security of UNHCR's staff and beneficiaries.

58. In Tunisia the Shousha camp was located close to a military hospital in a lawless area seven kilometres from the border with Libya. In Egypt, the camp was established in a fenced precinct of the Salloum border area. Effective site planning and camp management proved to be difficult in these circumstances, tasks that were further complicated by the unusual mixture of nationalities involved in the influx. At one point in time in Shousha, for example, the camp accommodated citizens of 25 different countries.

59. At the beginning of the emergency the two camps were regarded primarily as transit facilities for the thousands of third country migrants (Egyptians, Bangladeshis and Malians, for example) who were fleeing Libya and waiting to travel to their countries of origin. By 5 March, barely 10 days after the beginning of the crisis, more than 100,000 people had crossed the border into Tunisia and 85,000 into Egypt. As the UNHCR-IOM Humanitarian Evacuation Programme took off (to be analysed in a later chapter) the camps also became the home of refugees (around 3,800 in Shousha and 1,800 in Salloum) who had escaped from Libya and who were now awaiting resettlement.

#### *Tunisia*

60. In the early days of the emergency local Tunisian communities played an important role in providing accommodation and assistance to the new arrivals, most of whom were Libyans, Egyptians and Tunisians. As the influx continued, however, and the Shousha camp was established, the situation became less harmonious.

61. The town of Ben Guardane, a few kilometres from Shousha, had prospered on informal trade with Libya during the time of the Gaddafi regime. The people of Ben Guardane were generally bitter about the political changes that were taking place in Libya and opposed the

anti-Gaddafi rebels. During the evaluation mission, this tension culminated in an exchange of fire shots across the border, heightening the sense of insecurity felt by residents of the camp. Such incidents also absorbed a disproportionate amount of UNHCR's time and resources.

62. Further problems arose in Shousha when a number of West Africans, whose claim for refugee status and resettlement had been rejected by UNHCR, reportedly staged a demonstration which prompted indiscriminate retaliation by the local population. Given the fragility of the Tunisian state at this time, the country's security forces were unwilling to rein in the unruly local populace.

63. The camp was set on fire and looted, resulting in the loss of equipment worth an estimated \$1 million. The subsequent reconstruction of the camp cost a further \$300,000, while UNHCR also spent some \$2 million on Quick Impact Projects in Ben Guardane, intended to bring benefits to the local population, but also to appease it.

64. In terms of emergency relief, UNHCR staff in North Africa were unanimous in praising the speed and efficiency of the organization's Supply and Management Service and its service provider, Kuehne and Nagel, a logistics company with which UNHCR has a global airfreight agreement. Some 8,000 tents arrived within three days of the beginning of the emergency in Tunisia and 1,500 of them were erected in one night.

65. However, the quality of the tents initially dispatched to the field was found to be below standard. According to one Field Officer, these lightweight tents, capable of accommodating four or five people, "were very flimsy and only good for a family camping trip." With a rapid turnover of residents, most of them single male migrants, they required frequent replacement. Eventually, their place was taken by sturdier ridge tents, manufactured in Pakistan.

66. Many field staff expressed concern that UNHCR, which is responsible for emergency shelter within the Cluster System, did not have access to a wider range of types and sizes of tents. They also observed that it would have been cheaper to accommodate groups of 10 to 12 people of the same nationality in a single large tent.

67. Another recommendation made by staff in the field was that the tents should have arrived with a package of related relief items, including collapsible latrine kits with a precast plastic slab, which were expensive and difficult to mould in situ.

68. Although there were some attempts to carry out site planning at the beginning of the operation in Tunisia, the Shousha camp grew haphazardly around an existing military hospital. ICRC apparently warned UNHCR about the risks associated with the close proximity of the tents in the camp, and it was only after the fire had broken out that that proper site planning was carried out and the camp was divided in sections according to the nationality of the residents. Those interviewed by the evaluation team were unanimous in reporting a dramatic improvement in safety and security following this rearrangement.

69. With respect to water and sanitation, the work of UNHCR was greatly facilitated by the initial involvement of ICRC, which assumed responsibility for this sector until September 2011. Food was initially procured and distributed by ICRC, ACT (a small Tunisian NGO) and Secours Islamique, a programme taken over by UNHCR once camp numbers had dropped below 5,000.

70. Health activities were undertaken at first by several actors, including the Tunisian Red Crescent, the Tunisian and Moroccan military and Tunisian Civil Protection. The health sector was subsequently taken over by the NGO International Medical Corps. Morbidity and mortality rates were generally kept under control, largely because of the relatively good nutritional and health status of the new arrivals.

71. In addition to Shousha, two other camps were established close to the Ras Ajdir crossing point. One was the Al Hayat camp, built by IFRC to accommodate the overflow from Shousha, which closed in mid-July, by which time many third country nationals had been evacuated.

72. The other camp was set up by the United Arab Emirates and was commonly described as a "five star hotel," each tent being equipped with air-conditioning and a flat-screen TV! It was initially open only to people of Arabic descent, but following a UNHCR's intervention, it was opened to others, including protection cases referred by UNHCR.

### *Egypt*

73. The principal difficulty confronting UNHCR in Egypt derived from the government's decision to confine new arrivals to the border area and to deny them freedom of movement. It was also made clear from the beginning that the only solutions available were evacuation for the migrants and resettlement for the refugees. Asylum and local integration in Egypt were ruled out.

74. More generally, UNHCR's role in Egypt was complicated by the need for relatively straightforward operational issues to be approved by a senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), who would also involve the military and/or customs authorities in the decision-making process.

75. The fragility of the administration in post-revolutionary Egypt had some adverse consequences for the new arrivals. While waiting for permission to erect tents, for example, the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Salloum had to sleep in the open or in makeshift tents in and around the administrative buildings of the border crossing.

76. Weather conditions at this time were particularly harsh, with overnight temperatures close to freezing, strong winds and regular rainfall. Permission eventually came only in May and required interventions at the highest level from UNHCR Headquarters.

77. As in Shousha, nationalities were not separated, although in Salloum this was more understandable owing to the lack of space. Unlike Shousha, however, as many as two-thirds of the camp residents were Sudanese, mostly from Darfur. Single women belonging to minorities felt very insecure in this context.

78. The good nutritional and health status of the camp residents allowed morbidity and mortality rates to be kept within acceptable limits, although one outbreak of scabies took place, due in part to the poor sanitary conditions and overcrowding of the camp.

79. The initial response in terms of primary health care was provided by IOM and the Egyptian Ministry of Health (MOH) with the help of WHO and some NGOs. Later on, IOM assumed responsibility for the medical screening of refugees who had been selected for resettlement. This became an exceedingly complicated exercise, as it was very difficult for

refugees to get the authorization required to leave the Salloum border area and go to the nearest city with adequate medical facilities.

80. At this time, the authorities voiced a concern that refugees might escape and remain in Egypt, although it seems unlikely that a refugee who had already qualified for resettlement would choose this option. Such restrictions also affected the possibility of medical referrals for patients needing urgent treatment outside Salloum. Eventually UNHCR and MOH took over the whole of the medical programme with the exception of pre-resettlement check-ups.

81. The system involved the provision of mobile health clinics, paid for by MOH, with the Egyptian medical staff paid by UNHCR. This rather artificial and expensive way of dealing with health issues in Salloum (as opposed to allowing the refugees access to regular medical facilities) was again dictated by the security restrictions imposed in that location.

82. It is no surprise that the people in Salloum camp complained vociferously about the poor medical facilities available to them. Moreover the transition from an IOM-led medical programme to a UNHCR-led one was a rather complicated one, with initially unclear responsibilities and operating procedures.

83. Food was initially procured and distributed by a variety of actors, including Catholic Relief Services, the Egyptian Red Crescent Society and WFP. Later on, when the numbers fell below 5,000, WFP withdrew and ICRC took over, with responsibility for this activity finally being passed to UNHCR in October 2011.

84. Contrary to the situation in Shousha, there was no ration card system linked to an identity document with a photo and a serial number. As a result, some people were able to claim more than one food ration and shortages occurred on a regular basis. During the evaluation team's visit, plans were finally underway to address this problem. Water was initially provided in bottles and later on trucked to the camp by a commercial company. Residents complained bitterly about the water quality, although all the tests undertaken revealed that it was drinkable.

## Protection and solutions

85. While they were escaping from a ferocious armed conflict, the Libyans who fled from their country did not find themselves in a refugee-like situation. They benefited from visa-free border controls in Egypt and Tunisia, were able to enter and move freely in both countries, and were generally able to rely on their own resources and social networks.

86. Moreover, local populations did not make any distinction between those who supported and opposed the Gaddafi regime. In the words of one interviewee, “our Libyan brothers are welcome, regardless of their political affiliations.”

87. Major outreach and protection activities for Libyans living with host families were not necessary until mid-2011, when a degree of fatigue set in amongst the host population and some tensions were detected between local and Libyan families. In Tunisia, UNHCR was able to assist those Libyans who were in need and to conduct a household profiling exercise, but this was not possible in Egypt.

88. Unlike the migrant workers, children from Libyan families were given access to local schools in both Egypt and Tunisia, the principal problem being that secondary education in the latter country is provided mainly in French rather than Arabic.

### **Persons of concern to UNHCR**

89. One of the key challenges confronting the UNHCR operation in Egypt and Tunisia was to identify those new arrivals with protection needs. At the beginning of the emergency, the vast majority of people leaving Libya were migrant workers, predominantly young and relatively healthy males.

90. These people were generally able to benefit from the joint IOM/UNHCR Humanitarian Evacuation Programme, which by January 2012 had taken some 220,000 people representing 20 different nationalities back to their countries of origin. As the influx continued, however, other groups arrived at Libya’s borders, including Libyan citizens, refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, as well as other people with a potential claim to refugee status (primarily from countries in the Horn of Africa) but who had never approached UNHCR.

91. At the initial stage of the operation, individuals who were unwilling to return to their own country were referred directly to UNHCR, without a preliminary screening to determine whether their reluctance to return derived from a real need for international protection or from a desire to wait for other options. This arrangement obliged the people concerned to wait long periods of time for their first UNHCR registration interview and at the same time allowed them to develop false expectations with respect to their possible resettlement.

92. A key task for UNHCR was to identify those refugees and asylum seekers who had previously registered with UNHCR in Tripoli and who had arrived spontaneously in Egypt and Tunisia. This was complicated by the difficulties encountered in recovering the UNHCR database from Tripoli transferring it to the field operations in Salloum and Zarzis. As of

January 2012, UNHCR was still unable to estimate the total number of previously registered refugees and asylum seekers who had been able to reach the safety of Egypt or Tunisia.

93. Despite some of the difficulties identified in the preceding chapter, the protection environment in Tunisia proved to be a reasonably favourable one. It was less so in Egypt, where new arrivals were confined to a temporary facility in the border area. UNHCR's efforts to relocate refugees and asylum seekers to other parts of the country were unsuccessful.

94. While both countries kept their borders open, they also wanted prior assurances that persons of concern to UNHCR would be staying only on a temporary basis, pending their transfer to another country. In this respect, the substantial resources deployed by UNHCR and the organization's prominent role in the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme cannot be said to have expanded the protection space in Egypt and Tunisia.

95. In Egypt, the situation of Sudanese refugees arriving from Libya was a particular concern. In theory, this group should have benefited from the privileges provided under the 'Four Freedoms Agreement' signed between Egypt and Sudan in April 2004, and which provides the citizens of Egypt and Sudan with equal rights in relation to entry, residence, employment and freedom of movement. In practice, however, these privileges are not always respected, and UNHCR was left to resettle the refugees, thereby exonerating Egypt from its obligations under both the Refugee Convention and the Four Freedoms Agreement.

## **Registration**

96. In view of the size and speed of the influx, as well as the emphasis placed on the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme, registration was not carried out systematically during the early stages of the emergency in Egypt and Tunisia. Instead, a simplified process was used to determine the nationality and family status of the new arrivals, as well as their onward travel requirements. In Tunisia, a comprehensive database incorporating information on registration, status determination and resettlement was not available until August 2011.

97. During the initial phase of the operation, UNHCR also found it difficult to determine exactly how many people were residing in the camp, as there was no system in place to record arrivals and departures. The absence of statistical information, disaggregated by gender and age, made the identification of vulnerable groups a difficult task.

98. Data collection was also hindered by the fact that UNHCR and IOM did not establish a clear division of labour and did not agree upon a standard reporting format at the beginning of the operation. UNHCR should have established a basic registration system for the camp population when the operation commenced, including guidelines on how and who to register and how to deregister those people persons leaving the camp. In this respect, the early deployment of an experienced Information Management or Registration Officer would have been highly beneficial.

## **Refugee status determination**

99. Refugee status determination started only in the third month of the operation and was hindered by UNHCR's limited processing and reviewing capacity, as well as a lack of registration data. RSD staff, who were deployed on mission for an initial period of six

weeks, did not always have experience of conducting refugee status determination during emergencies.

100. In Shousha, accelerated RSD procedures were used extensively while the team in Salloum was not able to implement such procedures until late in the operation. A more systematic and harmonized use of accelerated procedures would have helped to defuse the tensions that arose as a result of the lengthy waiting period for a decision on refugee status - a necessary but not sufficient precondition for resettlement eligibility.

101. The delivery of rejection decisions was handled by both RSD and registration staff, who became involved in lengthy counselling sessions with an increasingly restless camp population. The use of interpreters from within the refugee community led to some serious concerns with respect to confidentiality.

102. To address such issues in future emergencies, it would be useful for UNHCR to strengthen its RSD deployment arrangements by establishing regional pools of pre-identified staff and consultants with expertise in conducting emergency RSD, as well as relevant language and counselling skills. Such rosters should be regularly updated due to the regular rotation of UNHCR staff from one region to another.

103. In this respect, some useful lessons could be learned from the Surge Project, which was launched in 2001 with the objective of establishing a roster of highly qualified protection professionals who are recruited by the International Rescue Committee and seconded to UNHCR for a period of up to 11 months.

104. Another lesson to be learned is that in emergencies for which resettlement is the primary durable solution, UNHCR should avoid frontloading resettlement capacity if commensurate registration and RSD capacity is unavailable.

### **Child protection**

105. In Tunisia, child protection was initially entrusted to UNICEF, which assumed responsibility for a jointly agreed referral and Best Interest Determination (BID) system. This arrangement proved problematic, however, as UNICEF did not deploy enough experienced staff and its work was very much focused on unaccompanied minors. Over time this activity was transferred to other partners, working under UNHCR's supervision, as the majority of children already processed for resettlement had not undergone a full BID assessment.

106. Best Interest Determination in Tunisia was not conducted in a systematic way, in part because of staff rotation. Handover arrangements were not adequate and meetings were not held in a systematic manner. There was not sufficient capacity for BID processing until the arrival of a Save the Children deployee in late September 2011. Once on the ground, the deployee was able to mobilize the resources required to process more than 50 BIDs within one month.

107. Standard Operating Procedures on the registration of children and adolescents were not in place at the beginning of the emergency. And until August 2011, it was difficult to get accurate statistics in relation to women and children. Family tracing did not start until late in the operation and psychosocial counselling was very limited.

108. Organizing education was a particular challenge in view of the number of different nationalities involved in the crisis. Most of the adolescents had missed out on a lot of their

education and accelerated learning programmes proved difficult to organize. Children residing in camps were not allowed access to local schools, and the few informal schools within the camps followed the UNICEF curriculum.

109. In the words of several interlocutors child protection consisted primarily in “getting them out of the camps as soon as possible”, as Shousha and Salloum were not considered to provide an appropriate environment for young people. As indicated already, this led to a situation whereby some children were resettled without a proper BID being conducted. A BID Panel should have been systematized and implemented as soon as UNHCR was made aware of the presence of children, including adolescents who were sometimes more difficult to identify as they were travelling with groups of young adults.

### **Sexual and gender-based violence**

110. From the very beginning, every effort was made to mainstream the issue of SGBV in UNHCR’s emergency response, although this was hampered by lack of data and an initial absence of clear procedures on registration and referral. The presence of a few sex workers in camps where single males were in the majority was especially problematic. Considering that most of these women were already working in Libya, it seems likely that many were victims of trafficking.

111. In contrast to the large number of child centres found across Tunisia, no such centres or safe houses existed for foreign women at risk. Some local NGOs ran safe houses for local single women in the north of the country, but in southern Tunisia such centres were not available at all. The closest was a centre in Gafsa, a governorate in the interior of the country, more than six hours drive from Shousha camp.

112. In general, community support remained challenging in a camp environment where the protection of women is further hampered by the location, a high concentration of single males, the presence of sex workers and easy accessibility. One NGO interlocutor dealing with protection issues in Shousha went to the extent of suggesting fencing the camp area and instituting regular checks. The evaluation notes with interest the recently published UNHCR Manual on Security of Persons of Concern, which may provide some useful guidance both to UNHCR and its partners in the field on issues such as tensions between communities, trafficking, sexual violence, and effective policing in camp settings.

113. Some argued that UNHCR should develop a “protection” emergency kit with general Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and best practices examples from other emergency operations. Practices and guidelines on relations with law enforcement agencies in camp settings were quoted as the most needed. Other guidelines included practices on general protection interventions and the early identification of vulnerable individuals and durable solutions in emergencies.

### **Durable solutions**

114. The need to find urgent solutions for people displaced by the Libya crisis called for the joint expertise of UNHCR and IOM and resulted in an unprecedented level of cooperation between the two organisations. On 1 March 2011 the High Commissioner for Refugees and the IOM Director-General announced that they would merge their operations to conduct a humanitarian evacuation programme for third country nationals (TCNs) who fled from Libya and were congesting the Tunisian and Egyptian borders.

115. Although this programme was arguably not strictly within UNHCR's mandate, given that many of those uprooted by the war in Libya were migrants who could return to their home countries, UNHCR lent its good offices to the initiative. This was partly because IOM, which lacks an emergency reserve fund, did not have sufficient resources to support the operation which had started on 28 February. But UNHCR's involvement was also based on the consideration that the evacuation programme would help to maintain the protection space available to refugees and asylum seekers who had fled from Libya and who were unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin.

116. As a result on 2 March a Joint UNHCR - IOM Humanitarian Evacuation Cell (HEC) was established in UNHCR HQs in Geneva. Between 2 March and 2 April UNHCR contracted a total of 151 flights which carried a total of 29,539 passengers to their destinations (Accra, Khartoum, Bamako, Dhaka, Cairo, Ndjamena, Ouagadougou, Cairo, Conakry and Lome). Some seasoned UNHCR officials, with previous experience in logistics and contracting planes, were put in charge of the HEC with the support of three DFID deployees, one at the Djerba airport (for the Tunisia operation), one in Cairo and one in Marsa Matrouh for the Egypt operation.

117. UNHCR's involvement ended on 2 April when IOM resumed full responsibility for the evacuation. Out of the total 151 flights, 140 were from Djerba, 10 from Marsa Matrouh and one from Cairo. The total cost was US\$ 18. 2 million, while the average cost per UNHCR flight was \$ 120,600 and the average cost per passenger was \$ 604.

118. During this period (2 March - 2 April) IOM contracted 117 flights. In total (from 28 February to the 3rd quarter of the year) there were 1,858 recorded flights for a total of 161,222 passengers. IOM arranged flights for 88,261 passengers, boat trips for 11,767 and bus trips for 45,445 for a total of 145,473 migrants, while donors and concerned countries organized flights for another 43,422. The grand total of stranded migrants repatriated by IOM, UNHCR and donors was 218,434 in January 2012.

119. Military ships were offered by some western countries to help with the evacuation effort but had to be refused to uphold the humanitarian principles of neutrality, which was of particular importance given NATO's involvement in the Libya conflict.

120. UNHCR's involvement in the humanitarian evacuation was generally efficient and effective. The HEC was staffed by 6 UNHCR and 6 IOM officials, and fully equipped within 24 hours. Prices were compared among various charter plane providers, and the price of air flights was initially compared with that of ships, but it was quickly determined that ships were not cost-effective.

121. Coordination between UNHCR and IOM was considered to be very good by those involved in the programme, while countries of origin and other stakeholders expressed particular appreciation for the timely and accurate information which the two organizations provided on departures.

122. In the field, the evacuation programme was managed quite independently from the camp operation and hence did not divert attention or resources from UNHCR's mandated activities. As an IOM evaluation noted, however, "the body of knowledge [to carry out these types of operations] resides in the minds of a few experienced individuals within the organization." Likewise, UNHCR should ensure that it retains and builds upon this type of expertise.

123. In March 2011, when growing numbers of persons of concern to UNHCR fled from Libya, the organization launched a Global Resettlement Solidarity Initiative for non-Libyan refugees and an Arab League Solidarity Initiative for Palestinians who were caught in the conflict. Neither of these initiatives received the expected interest and commitment of states, and most European states, which have relatively speedy resettlement procedures, failed to increase their quotas.

124. The USA's capacity to resettle the refugees was much greater, but was hindered by lengthy security checks. By the end of 2011, 66 per cent of 4,251 resettlement cases were submitted to the USA, but only 724 (17 per cent of the total) had physically departed.

125. The Arab League Solidarity Initiative urged Egypt to allow transit for those Palestinians who wished to travel to Gaza and appealed to all Arab League member states to provide them with temporary admission and stay. While the former objective was attained to some extent, the latter was not. Indeed, some instances of refoulement were recorded.

126. The initial focus on the evacuation of migrant workers to their countries of origin might have given some stakeholders a false signal that UNHCR could resettle persons of concern relatively quickly. In fact, several government interlocutors in Egypt and Tunisia noted that IOM had been faster than UNHCR in airlifting the migrants and asked why UNHCR could not do the same in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.

127. In fact, this has proven to be a very difficult task and it now seems likely that the resettlement process will continue well into 2013. As noted by a UNHCR inspection mission conducted in June 2012 noted, "from the beginning of the resettlement operation, predictions as to the likely month of its completion have proven inaccurate".

128. This experience has illustrated the rigidity of a resettlement system in which the need for responsiveness and flexibility is constrained by quota allocations, profile requirements, limited processing capacity and lengthy processing times on the part of resettlement countries.

129. In order to address these issues, UNHCR has proposed the establishment of a flexible pool of resettlement places, additional to annual quotas, to be used in emergency resettlement situations. While the proposal has met with mixed reactions on the part of the resettlement countries, UNHCR should continue to advocate for such an arrangement.

130. The operation's strong focus on resettlement was understandable but also had some negative consequences. While UNHCR was resettling refugees from Salloum, for example, refugees with the same profile in Cairo were still waiting to be resettled, often after years of waiting. It was therefore sensible of UNHCR to increase the resettlement quota for Cairo, thereby addressing the concerns of an increasingly vulnerable and frustrated urban refugee population.

131. In Tunisia, UNHCR established a cut-off date for resettlement eligibility only as of December 2011, while in Salloum the cut-off date was enforced three months earlier.

132. UNHCR linked the decision to implement a cut-off date in Salloum with a marked improvement of the situation in eastern Libya, although the cut-off date was implemented to address the pull factor in Salloum (i.e. people coming directly from Sudan, Chad and Cairo).

133. Some questioned why UNHCR decided to introduce a cut-off date so late into the operation. Such interlocutors also noted that UNHCR's announcement in relation to the cut-

off date was not clear in terms of its legal implications for refugees and asylum seekers who went back to Libya, where they were considered to be irregular migrants.

134. What remained unresolved was how to address the situation of people who arrived after the cut-off date. Even if they were registered, they could only expect to receive emergency assistance, while living in very poor conditions. A further difficulty concerned the late arrival of family members of refugees who had left Libya earlier and who were already in the resettlement pipeline. As in principle the late arrivals could not benefit from resettlement, they ran the risk of being separated from the rest of their family.



## Operations management and partnerships

135. Recent experience has demonstrated that a successful emergency response requires effective operations management and close coordination within UNHCR, both at Headquarters and between Geneva and the field. At the same time, it has become clear that UNHCR's close working relationships with other humanitarian actors is vital, not least in an emergency such as that created by the Libya crisis, which was markedly different from a conventional refugee emergency.

### **Operations management**

136. A positive feature of the emergency operation in Egypt and Tunisia was the extent to which individual UNHCR entities fulfilled their responsibilities and thereby contributed to the overall effectiveness of the operation. The MENA Bureau, for example, was widely credited with playing a positive and proactive role, particularly in its efforts to fill emergency staffing gaps.

137. The Division of Emergency Security and Supply (DESS) played a central role in ensuring the timely delivery of relief items to the field, while the Field Safety Section within DESS deployed very competent Field Safety Advisors who concerned themselves not only with the issue of staff security but also with that of maintaining access to persons of concern. In contrast, the UN's security personnel were widely regarded as being too bureaucratic and risk-averse in their approach.

138. The Division of International Protection, especially the Resettlement Section at Headquarters and the Resettlement Hub in Beirut, provided essential support and coordination to the operation. At the same time, the crisis underlined the need for UNHCR to boost its capacity for refugee status determination in emergencies, a challenge which in 2012 prompted the establishment of some 27 new RSD posts.

139. In terms of internal coordination, a UNHCR Task Force was established from the very beginning of the emergency in February 2011, bringing together all of the relevant entities and meeting on a daily basis. At the same time, a Coordinator for the operation was appointed.

140. These were positive initiatives, although a number of interviewees felt that they could have been communicated more effectively throughout the organization. Particular attention was drawn to the need for a clear explanation of the operational chain of command. At the same time, it was felt that senior managers of the operations in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, who eventually met at the end of 2011, could have been brought together at an earlier stage of the operation in order to synchronize their strategies.

141. With respect to internal coordination in the field, UNHCR operated with two quite different models. In Tunisia, a highly decentralized relationship was established between Tunis and the Field Office in Zarzis, while in Egypt, the relationship between Cairo and the Salloum Field Office was much more centralized. This was an understandable arrangement given the very limited size and non-operational nature of the Tunis office prior to the emergency.

142. In practical terms, the Tunis office assumed responsibility for external relations (including with the central authorities, the UN Resident Coordinator and Country Team, donor embassies and the media) while took charge of all operational issues. One consequence of this arrangement was Zarzis ended to refer policy issues to Geneva, bypassing the Tunis office, while important missions from UN agencies and donor states sometimes went directly to Zarzis, a situation that created some difficulties with the Tunisian government. A lesson to be learned from this situation is that diplomatic relations and protocol must not be forgotten in the rush to undertake operational activities, however urgent they might be.

143. Another lesson is that in the rush to reinforce the staffing structure in the field office closest to the point of delivery, the Branch Office should not be forgotten. In the case of Tunis, there was a weak capacity in programme, administration and human resources during the acute phase of the emergency. As an Inspection Mission has noted, “under the pressure of operational demands [UNHCR] “opted for ad hoc arrangements and overlooked the establishment of conventional systems and structures.”

144. The situation in Egypt, with a fully-fledged and well-staffed Office in Cairo, was the opposite. Staff in the field and UNHCR’s partners considered that the decision- making and clearance process was too slow as a result of its centralization in the Egyptian capital. At the same time, it must be recognized that UNHCR staff in Salloum generally lacked the seniority and authority to take important decisions, and that many aspects of the operation required UNHCR to negotiate with the authorities at the central rather than the local level.

## **Partnerships**

145. One of the principal difficulties encountered by UNHCR in this operation was the lack of experienced national implementing partners and the limited number of international NGOs who were ready to partner with UNHCR in this part of the world. As a result, UNHCR Tunisia was obliged to implement many activities directly and its oversight capacity was limited.

146. The early strategic decision to join forces with IOM to tackle an unconventional displacement crisis was regarded by many interviewees as having contributed very substantially to the effectiveness of the emergency operation. As the High Commissioner observed, “while the term ‘interagency coordination’ can generate considerable scepticism, this operation provided an opportunity to demonstrate what seamless and effective cooperation can achieve.”

147. While IOM staff were also generally positive about the relationship, some felt that UNHCR assumed a disproportionate amount of authority and gained an excessive amount of publicity in what was, essentially, a migration rather than a refugee crisis.

148. A key actor in the emergency operation was the ICRC, which provided consistently professional support to UNHCR not only in its mandated activities such as the tracing of family members, but also in the establishment of water supply systems, the procurement and distribution of blankets and other relief items for the refugees in Shousha, on the basis of good offices..

149. The vast majority of the UN’s pre-crisis activities in Egypt and Tunisia were development-oriented, and when the emergency erupted there was a general recognition

with the UN Country Teams that UNHCR, IOM and other humanitarian organizations (for example UNICEF and WFP) were best placed to assume a leading role in the operation.

150. Working under the Cluster Approach, OCHA assumed a leadership role in the coordination of assistance within Libya, but played a limited role in Egypt and Tunisia, where humanitarian activities were not 'clusterized'. Nevertheless, UNHCR could have explored ways to make better use of OCHA's expertise (particularly in Egypt, where it has a Regional Office) in facilitative rather than prescriptive forms of coordination in areas such as the organization of meetings, management of information and provision of maps.

### **Government relations**

151. UNHCR's relationship with the new Tunisian government was greatly facilitated by the fact that one of its senior officials had previously worked with UNHCR and was very familiar with humanitarian issues and an Accord de Siege with the authorities, which was previously lacking, was eventually signed in June 2011. However, this positive development did not succeed in effecting a change in Tunisia's longstanding policy that the country's refugees should benefit from the solution of resettlement and not be given the opportunity to locally integrate. Hence all refugees, including those unable to find a resettlement opportunity, were viewed almost solely as an international responsibility.

152. A complicating factor in the relationship was that the Tunisian police was associated with the previous regime and was not in a position to ensure the rule of law in the Shousha camp. As a result, UNHCR had to deal primarily with the military on security and other operational issues. This arrangement generally worked well, with the armed forces exhibiting a welcome degree of sensitivity on humanitarian issues.

153. UNHCR's relations with the Egyptian authorities were more complex, a situation that derived from the continued instability and insecurity of the post-Mubarak political environment, as well as limited protection space that was offered to UNHCR and persons of concern to the organization in the Salloum border precinct.

154. Like Tunisia, Egypt maintained a strong insistence that it is a transit country for refugees, rather than one where they can settle on a long-term or permanent basis.

### **Media relations**

155. UNHCR gained a great deal of positive media coverage in relation to emergency operation in Tunisia. High quality staff were deployed to Zarzis to deal with the massive arrival of journalists, diplomats and other visitors who might otherwise have distracted operational staff personnel from protection, assistance and solutions activities. In Tunis, relations with journalists were very ably managed by the head of office, who had recently participated in media relations training.

156. The lack of a similar PI officer in Salloum, compounded by political and logistical difficulties, meant that the Salloum operation received very little international attention. The sensitivity of UNHCR's Cairo Office and MENA Bureau regarding relations with the Egyptian authorities meant that media and public relations were not employed as a means of advocating for better conditions for persons of concern in Salloum, although donor countries were asked to advocate on behalf of refugee rights with the government.

157. While it has been suggested that OCHA, the UN Resident Coordinator and Country Team might have been able to fill this advocacy gap, it is difficult to see why such stakeholders, who were much less interested and involved in the emergency operation than UNHCR, would have been prepared to assume such a role.