

**High Commissioner's Forum, Agenda item 4  
Geneva, 12 March 2004**

**Statement by Mr. Kamel Morjane,  
United Nations Assistant High Commissioner**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address you today. It has been a busy week, and I extend my particular appreciation to those of you who have participated with us in all three of this week's events.

In my statement to the Standing Committee on Tuesday, I noted the need to change our approaches to solving refugee situations, particularly the protracted ones. The international environment in which we work today has evolved considerably since UNHCR was created over 50 years ago. Convention Plus is based on the same principles and values for which UNHCR has always stood, but offers a new opportunity to reflect and seriously transform the way in which we address refugee problems. The true test of the value of Convention Plus is whether it can bring about concerted action and new tools to resolve refugee situations in an effective, predictable and cooperative manner.

To that end, the Convention Plus process will, as the High Commissioner highlighted this morning, lead to generic sets of understandings and undertakings that can be incorporated into multilateral agreements designed to provide a comprehensive solution to a refugee situation. This process also involves determining which situations are most pressing and appropriate for collective responses, and putting together plans of action to do so.

UNHCR and the international community have experience with comprehensive approaches, notably the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese refugees, the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) and the Regional Conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

A common characteristic of these experiences is that they were largely reactive and motivated by geopolitical concerns. They also were characterized by tremendous multilateral cooperation. Unfortunately, however, international cooperation has not always been as effective as it could, and comprehensive arrangements have not been always pursued even for refugee situations that warranted them.

The large number of refugees languishing in protracted situations is a grim reminder of this.

Protracted refugee situations are characterized by long periods of exile, where refugees have been unable to return home and where other durable solutions have not been possible. It is difficult to put an exact number on this phenomenon, but a crude estimate suggests that some 9 million refugees, or 70 per cent of the global refugee population, are in long-standing situations. In 2004, we have allocated over 40 per cent of our budget for care and maintenance activities. While this spending is essential, and saves lives, it is a recurring expense and not an investment in the future, as compared to the 58 per cent reserved for both repatriation and local integration.

Let me repeat what we have been saying all along this week, that there is hope in sight for perhaps millions of refugees due in large part to peace processes in Africa and Asia that, while fragile, hold considerable promise. Past experience has shown that repatriation is not merely a result of peace, but of itself often helps to consolidate peace: sustained return is a clear barometer of a successful peace. Thus we continue our efforts in places such as Afghanistan and Angola, and are preparing for repatriation in connection with peace processes in Sudan, Liberia, Sri Lanka and Burundi.

This is where Convention Plus has real and tangible value. It offers a means of addressing both protracted and evolving situations in a proactive, rather than reactive, manner. It calls on us to examine current realities and opportunities and determine which situations can be resolved through a comprehensive holistic approach.

Two situations have been taken as examples for the implementation of the Convention Plus initiative. We thought that it would be useful to share them with you, even if these are still at the initial stage.

The first one is Afghanistan, a situation you are all familiar with, as its refugees have been with us for a quarter of a century. The situation has changed since the end of 2001. Some 2.5 millions refugees and half a million internally displaced persons have returned home, but in order to intelligently and durably bring the situation to an end, we must approach it in a comprehensive, collaborative and imaginative manner. This is why we are devoting much energy to an approach that we informally call 'Afghanistan Plus', in close cooperation with all countries concerned inside and outside the region. A team is working inside the Regional Bureau on this issue in close coordination with the Convention Plus Unit.

Let me return to Africa: the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative also provides an opportunity to identify situations that would benefit from the targeted use of development assistance. This may consequently open possibilities for durable solutions for refugees in Africa. This is why we are working on a system to guarantee the best possible coordination with the NEPAD actors and supporters including the NEPAD secretariat, the AU and the ECA and we are establishing a structure with our Regional Liaison Office in Addis Ababa. We are very pleased in this regard to benefit from the support and cooperation of Japan, in particular JICA, the set-up of a Unit in Addis Ababa. I do not need to underline again here the positive work done and the initiatives taken to achieve solutions in some cases like in Zambia and Uganda.

I would like to refer to a particularly difficult situation: this is the one involving Somali refugees, and as indicated by the High Commissioner in his opening statement, we last week organized a UNHCR Representatives meeting on preparing for a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Somalia. This approach would involve holistically addressing the situation both in Somalia and in exile. I believe that this useful meeting was a very significant first step, and look forward to the concretization of the Somali CPA.

UNHCR is actively pursuing such opportunities, and our two Regional Directors will provide further information on Convention Plus initiatives that are being pursued in their respective regions.

In addition to the situations that have already been identified, and as the High Commissioner indicated this morning, the Office is analysing other protracted refugee situations, including those for which a Convention Plus comprehensive approach might be appropriate – for example in the Great Lakes and Colombia. Another promising area is Nepal, where the High Commissioner is pursuing solutions for more than 100,000 Bhutanese who have been in camps for over a decade.

An update on our approaches to protracted refugee situations, including those amenable to Convention Plus initiatives, will be provided to the Standing Committee in its June session.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would now like to ask the Directors of the Africa and Caswaname Bureaux, David Lambo and Ekber Menemencioglu, who have been directly involved in the conception and preparation of the two initiatives I mentioned earlier – Somalia and Afghanistan – to provide you with more ample information on these situations.

Thank you.