

**High Commissioner's Forum**  
**(20 May 2005)**

**Introductory statement by Mr. Kamel Morjane**  
**Assistant High Commissioner**

Your Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen,

This is the fourth time we have met in this Forum in order to monitor progress on the Convention Plus initiative, as well as the different activities and processes it comprises. Let us all acknowledge straight away that we are a long way from realizing all of this initiative's promises. This realization can help us to adjust certain actions, but it cannot turn us away from our objective, which is to provide solutions to refugee problems as quickly as possible, and in such a way that ensures that these solutions are long-lasting and sustainable.

Convention Plus is neither a luxury nor an appendage on the edge of UNHCR's mandate. This undertaking is at the very heart of our mandate, which entails providing international protection and the search for durable solutions. The international framework for refugee protection, to which we are all attached, is in peril and protection becomes elusive if we allow situations of forced displacement to deteriorate or, worse still, if we blame each other when confronted with some that appear impossible to resolve.

Convention Plus is based on a dual certainty. The first is that the international framework for refugee protection deserves to be preserved and strengthened. The second is that, if it is to survive, this framework cannot afford to be self-limiting. Finding solutions to the problems of refugees requires us to explore fields related to our humanitarian work: international migration, sustainable development, and the maintenance of peace and security. I wish to be crystal clear on this: on no account does this mean that UNHCR is becoming a development, global migration management or peacekeeping agency.

What this does mean for UNHCR, however, is the need to seek partnerships with other international players – some new, but in all cases closer – both within the United Nations system and outside it.

For the countries supporting us, whether they are located in the North or the South, whether they are host countries or countries of origin, cash or in-kind donors, comprehensive approaches depend upon change at the national and international levels. Nationally, administrations and policies have to be “de-compartmentalized”, so as to make decisions and actions more complementary and coherent. At the international level, the tools for cooperation have to be made more flexible and, thus, more effective, making it possible to put the question of refugees on the agenda of States and to give priority to multilateral approaches, as opposed to the temptation to go it alone.

Let us also avoid becoming overly formalistic and bureaucratic. We work in a field where results have to be not only tangible, but also attuned to the realities of the human beings we are there to protect and assist. We must not lose sight of the refugees. We must listen to them. A large share of today's meeting will focus on the resourcefulness and potential contributions

of refugees. The best way to ensure that protection and durable solutions move forward in tandem is to capitalize upon these resources and the extraordinary human potential of refugees and returnees.

Before introducing the Progress Report, I would like to return a moment to the “international peace and security” dimension of the search for durable solutions. During the last meeting of the Forum, Mr. Lubbers, the former High Commissioner, already made clear that the Convention Plus initiative, as we currently know it with its three complementary strands, does not purport to address all of the problems that we confront in addressing refugee problems and durable solutions. For a number of years now, UNHCR has been making efforts to reinforce its partnership with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and we frequently participate in joint missions. In the same vein, we seek to ensure that our voluntary repatriation and reintegration programmes are an integral part of peace plans or peace processes, without, however, pretending to play a central role therein. For the African Union and the NEPAD initiative, for instance, UNHCR coordinates a working group on humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery, which has undertaken to review all peace agreements negotiated in Africa during the past few decades. This will contribute to future efforts to ensure a more systematic interface between negotiations aimed at ending armed conflict and those focusing on the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons. We would need more time than is available today to discuss this subject in greater depth. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important to take note of this point today and keep it in mind in any future reflection on how to link the peace and security dimension with that of durable solutions, which is the essence of Convention Plus

I shall now turn to the Progress Report before you. With your permission, I will not dwell on progress in the deliberations under each of the three now well-known strands, since each of these will be introduced and discussed in sequence during the day.

The question that I would like to ask you this morning is one which we are very often asked: How has Convention Plus concretely improved the situation of refugees? To what extent have our initiatives brought refugees closer to solutions that are durable and respectful of their rights, which they are entitled to expect from us – from all of us? As I said at the beginning, the answer to this question is still very mixed. Progress has been made, but it is still too slow and too uncertain. Overall, I would say that we are slightly better equipped to seize the opportunities for solutions that arise, but we still lack what I would call a Convention Plus “reflex”, namely, the ability to anticipate, to invest while being aware of the risks, and to implement actions that are both coordinated and sufficiently predictable.

This reflex should, of course, be an integral part of how our Office functions. I have personally observed and encouraged a growing number of initiatives launched by our Directors of Operations and Representatives in the field, which can clearly be considered as pursuing the Convention Plus approach. Some of these initiatives are already well underway, such as the 4Rs pilot projects, the search for comprehensive solutions for Afghan refugees or the Zambia initiative. Others, even more numerous, are still in the design phase. I am fully aware that we must draw lessons from past experience and this is why an evaluation of the 4Rs pilot projects is under way. We hope to be able to share the conclusions with you in our next Forum meeting. Likewise, I have asked for an interim evaluation of the progress made in the Zambia initiative – both the achievements and remaining obstacles – after close to three years of implementation.

There are also other ways to make our approach to durable solutions more systematic, which are already familiar to you. One consists of formulating frameworks of understandings on a number of topics, which is what you are doing together with us within the “Core Groups” that are the vehicle for the “generic” work under Convention Plus. Another method, also being implemented in the Convention Plus framework addresses the concerns that you and I share about how to resolve protracted refugee situations. It is in response to a recommendation of this Forum that a more systematic analysis of protracted refugee situations is being gradually integrated into the annual reports of the Regional Bureaux to the Standing Committee.

The ambition of designing a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Somali refugees was announced some time ago. The task is extremely complex, particularly in view of the erratic progress of the national peace and reconciliation process. Nevertheless, we are determined to continue this effort. At this very moment, our colleagues in the field and in New York are taking part in preparing a joint needs-assessment, being carried out on behalf of the United Nations Development Group. The added value of this approach is that it incorporates reintegration strategies for displaced persons within the broader framework for recovery and development of the country of origin. For its part, the CPA on which we are working is regional in scope and affords the opportunity to prepare for voluntary repatriation as well as other potential solutions, by working with refugees in their countries of asylum.

The Progress Report before you highlights the notable progress made in carrying out a systematic analysis of gaps in the protection capacity of a number of host States. On the one hand, the identified shortcomings present obstacles in the search for solutions and, on the other, demonstrate, in many cases, the heavy burden shouldered by developing countries in upholding their commitment to the principles of international refugee protection. The success of this innovative approach, which we are testing in four African countries under a specific project, but also in related efforts in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, hinges on close partnerships between the Governments of the countries concerned, donors, UNHCR, participating non-governmental organizations, and the refugees themselves. In addition, these projects use in a mutually reinforcing way the analytic and planning tools developed within UNHCR or by our partners. Examples include the participatory planning model pioneered through the pilot project for mainstreaming of age and gender perspectives into assistance and protection policies, and the socio-economic profiling of refugee populations, using the enhanced capacity to analyze data provided by Project Profile as well as the ILO’s expertise in this area.

Far be it from me to take precious speaking time away from the delegations present here. I encourage you to share with us, in all frankness, as is the custom in this Forum, your own achievements, your projects and your expectations of the international community.

Without wishing to enter into the topic appearing on the next item of our agenda, I would like to invite you to reflect upon a very particular characteristic of international relations, whether multilateral or bilateral, when it comes to development cooperation. Most often, development cooperation is approached from the standpoint of the needs and programmes of a particular State, i.e. from a strictly national point of view. There are excellent reasons for this, which is not the issue. But we all recognize that the search for durable solutions to problems of refugees necessarily goes beyond the confines of a single State: sometimes the reasons for and, in any case, the impact of forced displacement straddles several countries, or even an entire region. For this reason, regional instruments and mechanisms are increasingly called upon to play a role, and understandably so, in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. In

discharging our mandate, it is also important that we take due account of the regional dimension of durable solutions, and that our efforts to improve dialogue and coordination also extend to forging cross-border partnerships. This will be the theme that a multidisciplinary group of experts coming from all countries of West Africa will focus on in Ghana, in a meeting to be held in about 10-days' time, organized in cooperation with the ECOWAS.

I cannot conclude this overview without mentioning another regional approach, based on the Mexico Declaration of last November and covering a region, Latin America, which has contributed significantly to the development of innovative ideas, approaches and programs for durable solutions. I am, of course, referring to the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA). In the tradition of CIREFCA, but taking account of modern-day challenges, the three regional programs for solidarity devised in Mexico provide concrete burden- and responsibility-sharing models, deeply rooted in the protection principles derived from the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and the inter-American system for the protection of human rights. This is an important initiative, to which, I am sure, we will have the opportunity to come back during the general debate.

It is obvious that the systematic search for durable solutions is a demanding task. We can make this collective task easier if we redouble our efforts to improve our tools of cooperation and if we accept a frank and fully multilateral dialogue on the obstacles that remain. Allow me to emphasize, once again, that this effort is no substitute for the commitments that we have already made, even less for our treaty-based obligations for the protection of refugees around the globe. On the contrary, Convention Plus is founded on these very commitments and on these obligations, its aim being to make them more effective. It is not because we are trying to increase the impact of development aid that we can accept large portions of our humanitarian programs being under-funded, or that we can ignore crisis situations that require emergency or even preventive interventions. Likewise, it is not because we are endeavouring to strengthen protection capacities in the regions most affected by mass influxes of refugees that we must stop seeking to improve asylum procedures, the mechanisms for allocating responsibilities and integration programmes in other regions. We do not have a choice between protection, on the one hand, and durable solutions, on the other. The two pillars of UNHCR's mandate are inseparable. Protection is compromised if there are no prospects for durable solutions, just as solutions must be prepared and implemented in full respect of the principles of international protection, namely security, liberty and human dignity.

I am already looking forward to the no-doubt enriching debate that we will have in the coming hours and I thank you for your attention.

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