

PROGRESS REPORT: CONVENTION PLUS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This Progress Report provides an overview of developments in relation to the Convention Plus initiative since its inception in 2003, and an analysis of where the initiative has produced the intended results, as well as where it has fallen short of expectations. As the meeting on 17 November 2005 will be the last meeting of the High Commissioner's Forum devoted to Convention Plus, this report also outlines how the initiative will be mainstreamed into the overall work of UNHCR.

II. OBJECTIVES OF CONVENTION PLUS

2. At the first meeting of the Forum in 2003, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers described Convention Plus as a means to "promote a convergence of interests between cash donors and host countries, between countries of origin, countries providing protection in regions of origin, and countries further away which have a stake in solving refugee problems".¹

3. Convention Plus was to promote this convergence essentially in two ways. One was to focus on specific refugee situations that required a multilateral response to resolve them and to use Convention Plus as a means to bring States and other stakeholders together to do so. This was to be field-oriented and aimed to result in tangible improvements in those situations that were the focus of Convention Plus initiatives.

4. The second was to try to reach clear understandings with States and other stakeholders on their respective roles and responsibilities in regard to three areas: the strategic use of resettlement; the response to irregular secondary movements; and the targeting of development assistance for durable solutions to forced displacement. The idea was to conclude with a firm set of understandings in each of these three areas which could be relied upon in future responses to refugee protection problems.

III. THE PROCESS

5. At the first meeting of the High Commissioner's Forum, a note on "Initiatives that could benefit from Convention Plus"² was presented which provided a brief analysis of six situations where it was felt that comprehensive approaches could be developed. Of those six situations, two are currently the focus of comprehensive plans of action: the Afghan Comprehensive Solutions and the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somalia. Progress on these initiatives has been reviewed in various meetings of the Forum.

¹ Chairman's Summary: Inaugural Meeting of the Forum, 27 June 2003.

² FORUM/2003/03.

6. Other field-based activities related to Convention Plus that are ongoing include Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) initiatives in Zambia, Uganda and Ethiopia (as part of the cross-border initiative involving Ethiopia and Somalia). In addition, the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project has embarked on an ambitious effort to strengthen the protection capacities in four African countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania – based on a comprehensive analysis of gaps in protection capacity for each of the countries and a fully consultative methodology to develop projects to bridge the gaps identified.

7. To further the work on the development of understandings in the areas of resettlement and irregular secondary movements “Core Groups” of States and other stakeholders were established, jointly led by interested “Facilitating States” and UNHCR. Additional discussions were convened around the issue of targeting development assistance to achieve durable solutions, also led by Facilitating States and UNHCR.

8. The High Commissioner’s Forum has served as a means both to report on progress to date and to discuss and review areas of interest of States and other stakeholders. Among the documents that have informed this process are: “Making Comprehensive Approaches to Resolving Refugee Problems More Systematic”;³ the “Preparatory Project for the Elaboration of a Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somali Refugees”;⁴ and “Putting Refugees on the Development Agenda: How Refugees and Returnees can Contribute to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”.⁵ Convention Plus has also benefited from substantive documentation on the strategic use of resettlement and irregular secondary movements. In addition, UNHCR’s Regional Bureaux Directors have addressed the High Commissioner’s Forum on regional initiatives that are being pursued as part of Convention Plus.

IV. PROGRESS ACHIEVED

9. Progress on field-based activities mentioned above will be the subject of separate presentations to this meeting of the High Commissioner’s Forum.

10. In regard to reaching common understandings concerning the strategic use of resettlement, irregular secondary movements and the targeting of development assistance, the results have been mixed. A Framework of Understandings (MFU) on Resettlement⁶ was reached relatively early in the process, building on the previous efforts of the Working Group on Resettlement, as well as on the experience of resettlement partners, including States and NGOs. The MFU provides understandings that can be tailored to specific situations to facilitate the strategic use of resettlement. It is encouraging that the Norwegian Chair of the Working Group on Resettlement has identified as a priority the need to seize opportunities for the strategic use of resettlement in 2006, with the MFU as a central planning document.

11. The discussions in the Core Group on irregular secondary movements did not result in a framework of understandings due to the failure to arrive at a consensus on key issues under discussion. To help facilitate further work on the issue, the Core Group agreed that the Co-chairs would prepare a Joint Statement⁷ summarizing the viewpoints expressed on the very complex and difficult issues surrounding irregular

³ FORUM/2004/7.

⁴ FORUM/2004/8.

⁵ FORUM/2005/4.

⁶ FORUM/2004/6.

⁷ Contained in FORUM/2005/7.

secondary movements of refugees and asylum-seekers. The aim is to leave a record of the work of the Core Group and to inform future work by UNHCR or the Executive Committee on this topic. At its final meeting on 30 September 2006, the Joint Statement of the Co-chairs was unanimously endorsed by Core Group members.

12. Another important outcome of the discussions in the Core Group on irregular secondary movements was an enhanced understanding of why refugees and asylum-seekers move onwards. Key to this was the survey of movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, which underscored the importance of enhancing the protection capacities of receiving States. In this regard, UNHCR was encouraged to continue to develop the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somali Refugees. Many States also expressed support for the work of the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (SPCP) in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Benin and Burkina Faso and encouraged that the SPCP methodology be extended to other regions.

13. On the issue of targeting development assistance, no framework of understandings was achieved either, although there were areas of consensus. For example, there was broad recognition of the need for more concerted attention to incorporating refugees and their host communities in development planning and the implementation of poverty reduction strategies. It was also widely acknowledged that more needs to be done to address the challenges and constraints confronting developing countries in hosting refugees. The DAR initiative in Uganda and the Ethiopia and Somalia cross-border project serve as examples of targeting development assistance in practice. The Governments of Uganda and Denmark have developed a three-year plan in support of the implementation of the DAR initiative for 2005-2008, whereas implementation of the project in Ethiopia and Somalia, funded by the Human Security Trust Fund, is expected to begin in 2006.

14. The “Statement of Good Practice on Targeting Development Assistance for Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement” was discussed at an open meeting co-chaired by the Facilitating States and UNHCR on 16 September 2005. A proposal to establish a Focus Group of States and other stakeholders to enrich the Statement of Good Practice was not adopted. Most participants preferred to integrate deliberations on targeting development assistance to achieve durable solutions into the work of the Standing Committee. However, it was agreed that the Co-chairs would issue a Joint Statement⁸ on the deliberations to date, marking progress achieved and identifying areas where further efforts are needed. An open meeting is scheduled for 14 November 2005 to present and discuss a draft of the Joint Statement before presenting it to the High Commissioner’s Forum.

15. In addition to the Statement of Good Practice, discussions on the targeting of development assistance for durable solutions to forced displacement also canvassed areas where more work was needed to clarify the impact of such approaches on host States, and to provide further guidance on how to bridge the gap between the provision of humanitarian assistance and longer-term development assistance aimed at sustaining durable solutions.

V. MAINSTREAMING CONVENTION PLUS

16. The work on arriving at common understandings was intended to be completed by December 2005, while the specific field-based initiatives were to extend beyond the life of the Convention Plus Unit, and to provide useful methodologies for implementation in other UNHCR operations.

⁸ Contained in FORUM/2005/8.

17. UNHCR remains committed to the overarching goal of Convention Plus, deriving from the Agenda for Protection: to enhance burden and responsibility sharing and build commitments to resolve specific refugee situations, particularly those that have become protracted. It is encouraging to note the continued willingness of States and other UNHCR partners to remain engaged on these issues and to pursue efforts to translate Convention Plus into field-based projects as part of the Office's annual activities. As requested by the Executive Committee, reporting on these initiatives will henceforth be integrated into the work of the Standing Committee.

18. The work of the Convention Plus Unit will therefore be mainstreamed into the new structure for Headquarters. Its posts and functions will be absorbed by relevant Divisions and Units, including the Division of External Relations, the new Division of Protection Services and the Policy Development and Evaluation Unit.