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**Overview of UNHCR's operational strategies in  
the Middle East and North Africa****A. Situational analysis****Syria situation**

The nearly two-year old conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has had serious humanitarian consequences, which were exacerbated by an escalation in fighting during the summer of 2012. More than 830,000 Syrian refugees have been registered in neighbouring countries and in North Africa. This number continues to grow by an average of 5,000 refugees a day.

There has been exemplary cooperation among governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the region. The countries providing asylum to Syrian refugees are to be particularly commended for keeping their borders open, despite the strain on national resources and public services due to the presence of large numbers of refugees on their territories.

Inside the country, an estimated two million Syrians have been displaced and four million people are considered to be in need of assistance. Living conditions for some 71,000 refugees in the country (63,500 being Iraqi), for whom the Syrian Government maintains its entry and stay policy, have worsened, and UNHCR has increased its support for this population. While the security situation is worsening and humanitarian access remains challenging, a breakthrough was achieved recently when two UNHCR humanitarian aid convoys reached internally displaced persons (IDPs) stranded in the northern region of Azaz.

As part of the Syria United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan, UNHCR is working on its target of reaching one million IDPs. Since the start of operations in mid-2012, UNHCR has provided basic humanitarian relief items to over 500,000 persons inside Syria. A cash-assistance programme has also supported more than 15,000 families, while shelter assistance has been provided to 20,000 families. UNHCR and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have complemented the material and cash assistance programme with health, education and community services.

Lebanon is host to over 280,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to 7,300 Iraqi refugees. The Syrian refugees have been absorbed into 700 municipalities throughout the country. UNHCR and its partners are enhancing efforts to reach these refugees and to support their host families, whose generosity has led to strained resources. UNHCR and the Government are exploring how best to meet the shelter needs of all arrivals.

In Jordan, more than 252,000 Syrian refugees have come forward for registration, although the Government estimates that more than 300,000 have entered the country. The majority of the refugees are hosted by local communities, while the Za'atri camp has reached its capacity with more than 95,000 refugees. A second camp site, with a capacity of 30,000 persons and the possibility of further expansion, was opened in February. Refugees

both in the camps and in urban areas are being assisted by UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations.

Iraq, with over one million IDPs, now hosts more than 90,000 Syrian refugees, about half of whom live in camps. In addition, some 41,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of other nationalities are living in the country.

Some 22,700 Syrian refugees have been registered in Egypt and other countries in North Africa. More than 16,000 Syrians in Cairo and other urban areas in Egypt are being provided with housing, food assistance, basic non-food relief items, health care and education. UNHCR continues to provide protection and assistance to some 43,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt, mainly originating from sub-Saharan Africa, including some 5,000 new asylum-seekers registered in 2012.

In Libya, a new refugee registration centre has been established. Since the end of the Libyan revolution in October 2011, and particularly from September 2012 onwards, the number of Syrian refugees registered and assisted in Libya continues to rise and now stands at 4,700. Some 59,400 people remain internally displaced in Libya, primarily minorities who are unwilling or unable to return to their areas of origin. UNHCR carries out regular protection monitoring visits to IDP sites, ensuring that the population has access to health care and education, and that other basic needs are met.

### **Mali situation**

In Mauritania, a registration exercise in the Mbera camp between September and November 2012 determined that there were 54,100 refugees living in the camp. UNHCR and its partners adjusted the levels of assistance accordingly and pre-positioned relief items for new arrivals. Mauritania has received nearly 14,000 new arrivals from Mali since mid-January, the majority of whom are women and children.

A significant number of Malians have reportedly entered neighbouring Algeria. The Government of Algeria, UNHCR and the Algerian Red Crescent are exploring issues related to access and needs.

### **Confidence-building measures**

Family visits between refugees in Tindouf, Algeria, and their families in Western Sahara, which form part of the Confidence-Building Measures (CBM) programme, have run smoothly with introduction of a larger aircraft in April 2012. More than 4,600 individuals enjoyed family visits last year, with close to 17,000 having taken part in the programme since it began in 2004.

### **Yemen**

Yemen continues to host more than 237,000 refugees, mainly Somalis. Despite facing ongoing insecurity and increasing economic difficulties, in 2012 Yemen opened its doors to a record 107,500 refugees and migrants fleeing the Horn of Africa in search of protection, safety and economic opportunities. Over 84,000 of the new arrivals were Ethiopians, with Somali refugees making up the remainder. Due to difficult living conditions and the volatile security situation in the country, refugees and asylum-seekers have become increasingly vulnerable, relying on UNHCR legal services and humanitarian assistance.

Some 385,300 people are internally displaced within Yemen, mainly in the north of the country. In the south, around 98,000 IDPs have returned to their areas of origin in Abyan Governorate. In close coordination with other humanitarian actors, UNHCR supports the returning IDPs with humanitarian assistance, legal services and shelter support.

## **B. Achieving the Global Strategic Priorities**

Since the onset of the Arab Spring in early 2011, UNHCR has been challenged by multiple emergencies in the Middle East and North Africa region. Increasingly complex protection issues are emerging, while insecurity is challenging humanitarian operations and limiting access.

*Ensuring a favorable protection environment*

UNHCR is responding to growing interest among States in the region in developing national asylum systems and formal policies on IDPs. An asylum law has been drafted in Algeria, and UNHCR has provided advice to the Government on the draft legislation. In Yemen, the Office is providing technical assistance to the Government in the development of a national IDP policy.

The number of new arrivals in Israel has decreased significantly, dropping from a monthly average of 1,500 persons at the beginning of 2012 to less than 50 by year-end. This can be attributed to increased security measures and legislative action which have restricted asylum space. UNHCR's protection and advocacy efforts, in coordination with a vibrant civil society, continue to promote access to refugee status determination procedures and the improvement of conditions for 64,000 persons of concern in the country.

The Middle East and North Africa continues to be a region of transit and a destination for mixed population movements, including human smuggling and trafficking. These movements originate in the East and Horn of Africa. Several routes are used including travel across the Gulf of Aden into Yemen and onwards to the Gulf countries; through Egypt and the Sinai into Israel; and across North Africa towards the Mediterranean. The Office has developed a regional strategy that focuses on the Sinai, with the aim of enhancing coordination and cooperation among various stakeholders.

UNHCR is building on momentum in the region to address long-standing statelessness issues. In Kuwait, UNHCR continued to advocate for a mechanism that would protect the rights of stateless persons, including access to basic services, until a durable solution can be found.

*Facilitating durable solutions*

Despite the volatile security environment in Iraq, nearly 84,900 refugees returned to the country last year, of whom 57,000 returned from the Syrian Arab Republic mainly due to increasing insecurity in the host country. UNHCR supported the integration of over 100,000 refugee and IDP returnees in Iraq and provided 1,600 people with voluntary return packages. In Yemen, UNHCR has been advocating with the Government and the international community to ensure the sustainable return of almost 100,000 IDPs in Abyan Governorate.

Resettlement remains an important protection tool throughout the region. UNHCR submitted more than 9,700 Iraqi refugees for resettlement in 2012. UNHCR is also exploring resettlement opportunities for those refugees in Yemen for whom there are no alternative solutions.

The Office continues to search for solutions for persons of concern in Egypt and Tunisia who fled Libya during the violence that erupted in 2011. Since the launch of the Global Resettlement Solidarity Initiative, 3,600 refugees in the Shousha camp in Tunisia have been submitted for resettlement. This number includes 2,640 refugees who were accepted by resettlement countries and who have departed. Approximately 1,145 individuals, comprising mostly refugees, but including some asylum-seekers and rejected asylum-seekers, remain in the transit camp. Anticipating that some of the refugees in the camp will not be resettled, UNHCR is working with its partners and the Tunisian Government to find other solutions for this group before the transit camp is closed later this year. Rejected asylum-seekers have been encouraged to sign up for the voluntary return programme organized by the International Organization for Migration.

In Egypt, 2,000 refugees in the Saloum port area have been submitted for resettlement, of whom 690 have been accepted and 565 have departed to resettlement countries. Some 1,700 refugees and asylum-seekers in Saloum have been relocated to a new site established by UNHCR in order to improve their living conditions pending durable solutions.

The identification of solutions for the residents of the Hurriya temporary transit facility in Iraq remains a challenge. In line with the memorandum of understanding signed between the Government of Iraq and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the relocation of 3,100 residents from Camp New Iraq (formerly Ashraf) to the Hurriya

temporary transit location in Baghdad was completed in 2012. UNHCR has made urgent appeals to the international community to offer solutions outside this Iraq for this group in the spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing. The recent rocket attack on the Hurriya site underscored the urgency of finding solutions for its residents.

*Mobilizing public, political, financial and operational support through strategic partnerships*

UNHCR has strengthened partnerships with the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, increasing support for the work of the Office. Collaboration with Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar, through her “Educate a Child” initiative, led to a major, four-year education project. This already enabled 170,000 refugee children to attend school in 12 countries in 2012.

GCC governments continued to demonstrate tolerance towards asylum-seekers and refugees however, resettlement and voluntary repatriation are prioritized as solutions. The United Arab Emirates responded positively to UNHCR's request for the disembarkation of a group of Sri Lankan asylum-seekers rescued at sea.

### **C. Financial information**

Inter-agency needs for the large-scale response to the Syrian refugee situation are captured in the UNHCR-led Regional Response Plan (RRP) for Syrian Refugees, and the Syria Humanitarian Assistance and Response Plan (SHARP) for inside Syria, led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which have budgets of US\$ 1 billion and US\$ 500 million respectively for the first half of 2013. On 30 January, a humanitarian donor conference in Kuwait resulted in more than US\$ 1.5 billion in pledges of support for the work of UN agencies, governments and NGOs assisting Syrian refugees and IDPs. The positive response reflects the strong solidarity of the international community and continued support for humanitarian operations.

The 2013 regional budget approved by the Executive Committee has been revised upward from US\$ 593 million to US\$ 930.1 million. This includes US\$ 781.1 million for the Middle East region to meet the needs of Syrian refugees, as captured in the RRP for the first six months of the year, in addition to the Iraq and Yemen situations. Through a 2013 Supplementary Appeal of US\$ 10.5 million for Yemen, the Office aims to address the needs of IDPs returning to Abyan. The 2013 budget approved by the Executive Committee for North Africa was US\$ 139.7 million and has been increased by US\$ 9.3 million for Egypt to meet the needs of Syrian refugees as part of the RRP.