



Challenging Times Dangerous World

by António Guterres

UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES



An internally displaced woman carries aid supplies to her shelter at the Maajo IDP settlement in Mogadishu, Somalia.

WE LIVE IN CHALLENGING TIMES in a dangerous world. Events causing displacement are happening everywhere – except, it seems, where we plan for them. In 2011, a quick succession of new displacement crises in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Yemen and Somalia, combined with intractable existing conflicts in places such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stretched our capacity to respond to the breaking point.

The persistence of conflict in many parts of the world has had a clear negative impact on durable solutions for refugees. Fewer than 200,000 were able to return home

voluntarily in 2010, the lowest figure in more than 20 years. More than 7 million refugees (or two thirds of all refugees for whom UNHCR has responsibility) find themselves in protracted situations of exile, without a solution in sight.

Many large-scale natural disasters in 2011 have occurred in highly developed countries such as Australia, Japan and the United States, but the developing world remains much more vulnerable to their impact. The international community needs to be prepared to respond in a fully coordinated and effective way, while at the same time building the resilience of States and communities to such catastrophes.

SIMULTANEOUSLY CONFRONTED BY OTHER CHALLENGES

A number of well-known factors continue to limit humanitarian space and our ability to respond to the needs of refugees and the internally displaced. The changing nature of conflict – the multiplicity of actors, banditry, the subordination of human rights to national sovereignty, the blurring of the lines separating civilian and military spheres – continues to pose serious dangers for humanitarian principles and workers.

At the same time, asylum space has long been under threat, with populist politicians and certain elements of the media promoting xenophobia and scapegoating refugees and other foreigners. Asylum-seekers increasingly face limitations in their access to refugee status determination systems, and rights long respected for refugees begin to be scaled down. There have even been incidents of expulsion and abuse.

As if all this were not enough, the nature of displacement has also become more complex.

Population growth, urbanization, food insecurity, water scarcity and particularly climate change are increasingly interconnected and are combining with conflict and violence to generate displacement. These megatrends cannot be responded to effectively in isolation, yet the international community still lacks the mechanisms – and often the will – to respond holistically.

To take the most dramatic current example, Somalia is an object lesson in the consequences of a festering conflict, drought and not always consistent action on the part of the international community. As a result, hundreds of thousands of desperately malnourished people are displaced within and outside the country. The vast majority of refugees continues to go to Somalia's immediate neighbours Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen,

for whom this influx poses significant challenges. These countries are to be commended for continuing to extend their welcome to the new arrivals.

SOLUTIONS

In light of the increasingly difficult climate for durable solutions for refugees, we will need to put even more emphasis on achieving them as we go forward. I have noted already the challenges posed to voluntary repatriation by continuing conflict. Nevertheless, some 118,000 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned to their home country, twice as many as in the previous year.

Given the limited opportunities for voluntary return, resettlement has become an even more vital solution. UNHCR submitted some 108,000 refugees for resettlement in 2010, and almost 73,000 departed to resettlement countries. The volume of resettlement submissions has tripled in the past few years, but we are committed to doing even more, since the needs are still larger than the number of resettlement places available. It will not be easy, as our appeal for additional places in response to the urgent resettlement needs of refugees displaced from Libya into Egypt and Tunisia made clear that many resettlement countries are reluctant to enlarge their programmes, even temporarily. Global resettlement needs are estimated at 172,000 people in 2012 alone, compared to only 80,000 available spaces. The number of resettlement countries, however, continues to grow. It stands currently at 25. With continued advocacy and support, such as twinning established resettlement countries with newcomers and more engagement with the municipalities to which refugees are destined, I am confident that even more countries will establish programmes.

WITH RESPECT TO LOCAL INTEGRATION and self-reliance, increased international solidarity and burden-sharing are the inescapable prerequisites. Twenty per cent of the world's refugees are hosted in developing countries, and more than ten per cent have found refuge in countries with a GDP per capita below USD 3,000 a year. The generosity shown by these countries to refugees needs to be matched by the international community, in particular through development assistance to refugee-hosting areas. The joint Transitional Solutions Initiative by UNHCR and UNDP in eastern Sudan promises to be an example for such assistance, targeting more than 60,000 long-staying Eritrean refugees and their Sudanese host communities.

The decision of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to make work permits available to registered Afghan refugees and the comprehensive Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees developed by the Government of Pakistan represent outstanding examples of innovative responses to long-term and seemingly intractable refugee situations. Mobility and migration management policies are another, particularly where none of the three traditional durable solutions is attainable.

RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES

Responding to the challenges we face will require not only a cost-efficient operating structure but significant reinforcement of capacity.

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UNHCR / S. MASEOLA

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres and Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation Ms. Gunilla Carlsson talk to internally displaced people, Qanashely site, Dollow, southwestern Somalia.

The deep structural reforms UNHCR has undertaken since 2006 are paying dividends. Over the last five years, we have reduced our staff costs from 41 per cent to 27 per cent of overall expenditure. We have shrunk Headquarters costs – including both Geneva and Budapest – from 14 per cent to 9 per cent in the same period. Without this significant reduction and the outposting of 30 per cent of our Geneva-based staff, the rapid rise in the value of the Swiss franc would have made responding to the multiple emergencies in 2011 even more difficult.

At the same time, we have been steadily building up our capacities in protection and emergency preparedness. New priorities are now being developed in information management and inter-agency coordination, together with an increased emphasis on accountability – both to beneficiaries and in terms of oversight.

With respect to emergency preparedness and response, the rapid succession of crises has underlined both how far we have come and how

much further we have to go. More than 600 staff have so far been deployed on emergency missions during 2011, two-and-a-half times more than last year. At some point in June, more than 300 staff were deployed at the same time, including standby partners and volunteers.

While I am impressed by the willingness of our staff to take up highly demanding deployments on short notice, every individual who goes on mission leaves a gap somewhere else in the organization. The pressure we have experienced is not one we could sustain indefinitely.

In consequence, we are developing a staffing model that will allow for faster deployments at the outset of an emergency and a more structured way of transitioning to the next, non-emergency staffing phase. Criteria for defining, declaring and categorizing emergencies will allow UNHCR to initiate a corporate emergency response. We will increase the speed with which financial resources are allocated to new emergencies, aiming to issue the first

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refugee funding appeals within 72 hours of the declaration of an emergency, and exploring ways of better coordinating with other organizations around these appeals for refugee situations. We will strengthen in-country leadership and increase emergency training for staff at middle and senior levels to ensure the highest possible quality of emergency response.

With respect to protection, UNHCR's planning for protection capacity is becoming more strategic. We are reviewing our plans for strengthening protection staffing, learning and partnerships by projecting needs in these areas for key operations over the coming five years. Eighty-eight additional protection posts were created in 2010 and 2011 in a number of key structural protection areas in different regions, as well as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan. Meanwhile, the Global Learning Centre in Budapest will soon be completing a comprehensive review of protection skills and competencies of UNHCR's existing workforce. Several new or updated training programmes will focus on protection leadership and coordination skills in both refugee and IDP situations.

We will continue to emphasize protection partnerships in 2012, with particular focus at the national level. For example, UNHCR will pursue a range of partnerships with local NGOs and community-based organizations. The aim of this is to help communities improve access to protection for all their members, and to ensure women and children actively participate in this process.

BUILDING ON THE LESSONS LEARNED during some of the large-scale humanitarian emergencies of the past two years, we will also invest more in the way we manage inter-agency relations and provide support and leadership to partners. We will develop a framework, in consultation with our key partners, for ensuring more predictable and accountable inter-agency engagement in refugee emergencies, under the overall leadership of UNHCR. Reinforcing our capacity in coordination and information management is a key priority in this respect.

Finally, and critically, we will place even more emphasis in 2012 on improving accountability and control. The past several years have been a period of intense focus on increased efficiency and completing our structural reforms. During

the same period, the volume of our operational activities has almost doubled. We now need to invest strategically in accountability and oversight to ensure we have the right structures in place to properly and efficiently manage this increased volume of activity.

PARTNERSHIPS/SOLIDARITY

In December 2011, we will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Earlier in the year we marked the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Statelessness Convention and the 150th anniversary of the birth of Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees. The Commemorations process is an opportunity for States to reaffirm core values, pledge concrete actions to solve refugee and statelessness problems, and fill gaps in protection (notably those arising from new forms of displacement). It is an opportunity too for countering xenophobic and racist public attitudes towards refugees and asylum-seekers. Public debate in several countries continues to be dominated by populist messages fueling hostility towards foreigners, including refugees. We need to find better ways of curbing the influence of such messages. Solidarity is the only viable response to displacement – both with those who flee and with those who receive them.

Stronger partnerships are vital to achieve our goal of enhancing protection. We will continue to build new and expanded partnerships with governments, other UN agencies, the broader humanitarian community – in particular NGOs – and our people of concern.

Finally, a word on funding. I am deeply grateful that despite these times of economic turbulence our donors' confidence in us is stronger than it has ever been. In 2010, we received a record USD 1.86 billion for our programmes in 2010, from an increasingly broadening donor base. Contributions from the private sector have almost quadrupled in the past five years, while a growing share of our funding comes from non-traditional donors and pooled funds. Given the increasing number and complexity of the challenges we face, we will need to continue to attract unprecedented levels of support. We know we will have to earn it, by bringing our reforms to full fruition and achieving our priorities. We are committed to succeed – given the unique trust of our mandate, failure is not an option. ■



Somali refugees walk the long distance from the refugee camp or from the beach when they arrive in Yemen, to Aden.