

**Expert Meeting on International Cooperation to Share Burden and  
Responsibilities  
27-28 June 2011**

**Concept Note**

**1. Background**

The international refugee regime is predicated on cooperation between States. It requires that States address refugee problems collectively, sharing responsibilities to balance the burdens. The need for international cooperation is referred to in the Preamble of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (“1951 Convention”) as well as other regional and international instruments governing refugee protection, such as the OAU Convention, the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, and European Union law. Cooperation has also been a core element of a significant number of General Assembly Resolutions and UNHCR Executive Committee (“ExCom”) Conclusions.

The importance of cooperation reflects the reality that refugee challenges are inherently international, and cannot be addressed by any one State alone. While each State is required to meet its obligations to refugees within its jurisdiction, regardless of the existence of mechanisms for cooperation, unilateral and bilateral responses to such challenges do not provide a sustainable way forward.

Despite the importance of international cooperation, the international refugee protection regime offers no agreed parameters for how such cooperation would be concretized in practice. There have been a number of previous successful examples of cooperation to improve responses to specific refugee situations. Cooperation is taking place in a more structured way for certain situations and in certain regions. Initiatives leading to the sharing or redistribution of responsibilities are becoming more frequent, including resettlement pools and emergency evacuation arrangements. There has also been greater consistency and reliability to shared efforts to respond to humanitarian crises. But improvements are not being made across the board, nor through a coherent global framework.

All States have a direct interest in and would benefit from better international cooperation to address common refugee challenges. Mechanisms to facilitate the development and implementation of collaborative responses to address, for example, mass influx, protracted refugee situations, irregular secondary movements and rescue at sea, will assist all States to better meet their refugee protection responsibilities.

The term “international cooperation” refers both to a framework for cooperation among States (i.e. a “cooperative arrangement”), as well as to a set of specific actions for the sharing of burden and responsibilities to address and resolve refugee situations (i.e. financial, material, and/or physical assistance). Mechanisms for cooperation can take many different forms. They include small-scale, “targeted” arrangements between two or more States to address an imbalance in responsibility or capacity for one phase of the response to a particular refugee situation or sub-group of refugees.

On the other end of the spectrum, cooperative arrangements can include “comprehensive regional approaches”, or broad strategies adopted by certain interested States – often with support from outside the region – to address a shared challenge.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of their scope, cooperative arrangements need to address the interests and specific concerns of each State involved. Further, it is important to retain flexibility and adaptability to specific refugee situations and regional contexts.

At the 2010 *High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges: “Protection Gaps and Responses”* (“High Commissioner’s Dialogue”) held in Geneva on 8 and 9 December 2010, participants recognized that the need for better international cooperation in the refugee area is a longstanding issue of concern to many States in all regions of the world. Participants recommended that international cooperation be included as a theme of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorations in 2011.<sup>2</sup>

Participants also suggested that the development of a “Common Framework on International Cooperation to Share Burden and Responsibilities” could be a first step towards identifying core parameters that could underpin future arrangements for international cooperation.<sup>3</sup> This Framework could be supported by an operational toolbox identifying some basic triggers and elements of cooperative arrangements. In creating such a Framework, one important first step will be to develop a more coherent understanding of the parameters for international cooperation, the triggers for collective action, and the forms such action might take. It is also valuable to take stock of previous efforts to enhance international cooperation, to identify lessons learned as well as positive elements, in order to move forward.

## **2. Objectives of the Expert Meeting**

This Expert Meeting will build on the outcomes of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue. Its conclusions and recommendations will guide the development of a Common Framework for International Cooperation to Share Burden and Responsibilities.

The immediate objectives of this Expert Meeting are to identify:

- (1) situations/refugee challenges where better international cooperation could be instrumental;
- (2) common elements and lessons learned from previous cooperative arrangements; and

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of “comprehensive” can be understood in terms of the broad set of stakeholders involved, the focus on addressing the full “life-cycle” of displacement, and/or the range of actions and activities adopted.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, *Breakout Session 2: International cooperation, burden sharing and comprehensive regional approaches - Report by the Co-Chairs*, 8 December 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/4d09e4e09.html> (accessed 21 December 2010). See also UNHCR, *High Commissioner’s Closing Remarks, 2010 Dialogue on Protection Gaps and Responses, 9 December 2010*, <http://www.unhcr.org/4d0732389.html> (accessed 22 December 2010).

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *Breakout Session 2: International cooperation, burden sharing and comprehensive regional approaches - Report by the Co-Chairs*, 8 December 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/4d09e4e09.html> (accessed 21 December 2010). See also UNHCR, *High Commissioner’s Closing Remarks, 2010 Dialogue on Protection Gaps and Responses, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 9 December 2010*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4d0732389.html>.

- (3) parameters/benchmarks for future cooperative arrangements, including burden-sharing mechanisms and triggers for collective responses.

### **3. Convener**

The Expert Meeting will be convened by UNHCR.

### **4. Suggested Participants**

Approximately 25 participants are envisaged

- Senior government representatives from interested States
- International organizations and non-governmental organizations
- Academics and other experts

### **5. Timing and Location**

Monday 27 June and Tuesday 28 June 2011 in Amman, Jordan

### **6. Documentation**

A background paper on “International Cooperation to Share Burden and Responsibilities” will be made available to facilitate discussion at the Expert Meeting.

Additional documentation will include materials relating to past examples of cooperative arrangements, relevant international and regional legal texts and policy guidance.

Division of International Protection (DIP)  
UNHCR  
29 March 2011

## DRAFT AGENDA

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### DAY 1 – Monday 27 June 2011

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#### Morning [09.00 – 12.30]: Plenary

09:00 – 09:15 *Welcome*

09:15 – 09:35 *Opening Address*

09:35 – 10:35 *Common challenges requiring better international cooperation to share burden and responsibilities*

10:35 – 11:00 *Coffee Break*

11:00 – 12:30 *Cooperative Arrangements – Elements and Lessons Learned*

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#### 12.30 – 14.00 Lunch

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#### Afternoon [14.00 – 17.30]: Working Groups followed by Plenary

14:00 – 16:00 *Working Group 1 – Cooperative arrangements to address mass influx situations*

*Working Group 2 – Cooperative arrangements following rescue at sea operations involving asylum-seekers and refugees*

*The following questions will be discussed in the Working Groups*

- What are some other examples of cooperative arrangements to address these situations?
- What were the elements and characteristics of these cooperative arrangements? (e.g. actors, their roles, framework used, forms of burden and responsibility sharing, scale (targeted or comprehensive?), temporal scope, phases of the “displacement life-cycle” addressed?)
- What worked well?
- What were the challenges and obstacles?
- Lessons learned from the examples?

16:00 – 16:15 *Coffee Break*

16:15 – 17:15 *Plenary – Reports from Working Groups*

17:15 – 17:30 *Summary of Day 1*

#### 18.00 – 20.00 Reception

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**DAY 2 – Tuesday 28 June 2011**

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**Morning [09.00 – 13.00]: Plenary, followed by Working Groups**

09.00 – 10.00 *Plenary – Introduction to Day 2*

10.00 – 10.15 Coffee Break

10.15 - 12.15 *Working Group 3 – Cooperative arrangements to “unlock” protracted refugee situations*

*Working Group 4 – Cooperative arrangements to address refugee protection and mixed movements*

*The following questions will be discussed in the Working Groups*

- What are some other examples of cooperative arrangements to address these situations?
- What were the elements and characteristics of these cooperative arrangements? (e.g. actors, their roles, framework used, forms of burden and responsibility sharing, scale (targeted or comprehensive?), temporal scope, phases of the “displacement life-cycle” addressed?)
- What worked well?
- What were the challenges and obstacles?
- Lessons learned from the examples?

12.15 – 13.00 *Plenary – Reports from Working Groups*

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**13.00 – 15.00 Lunch**

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**Afternoon [15.00 – 17.00]: Plenary**

15.00 – 16.00 *Drawing together the results of the Working Groups and developing some recommendations*

16.00 – 16.15 Coffee Break

16.15 – 17.00 *Conclusions and Summing Up*

**17.00 End of Expert Meeting**