

# Strengthening emergency response

In recent years, UNHCR has responded to an increasing number of large-scale emergencies, each involving more than half a million displaced people. There has been a new large-scale emergency every 16 months—and a massive emergency every two years, involving the displacement of more than 1.5 million people. UNHCR also deals with an ever larger number of smaller emergencies.

To face the challenges of such emergencies, UNHCR has strengthened its planning, human resources, supply stockpiles and early warning systems. Much progress has been made, but more needs to be done.

One of the High Commissioner's principal commitments is to ensure that UNHCR is better equipped to respond to emergencies in any part of the world, including to situations of internal displacement through the cluster approach. UNHCR is now in a position to mobilize emergency response teams within 72 hours to respond to the immediate needs of 500,000 people in a humanitarian emergency.

UNHCR's strategy reflects new inter-agency efforts and working methods outlined in the Humanitarian Reform Initiative. It incorporates many elements, including an increase in the number of staff who are experts in emergency preparedness and response; more effective use of information technology, telecommunications and logistics; cost analyses for the provision of relief items; changes in internal rules to make emergency response more rapid and flexible; and the strengthening of standby agreements with other organizations to deploy technical expertise.

Responding to emergencies requires operational commitment, available staff and resources, and inter-agency coordination. The quality of the response depends on the speed at which the right people, relief items and operations support equipment can be mobilized, as well as strong management and administration. Early warning and situation-specific awareness are also key components of emergency preparedness, as are partnerships to coordinate an effective response. UNHCR will continue to strengthen all of these elements in 2009.

In the first nine months of 2008, UNHCR provided emergency support to some 40 countries through 207 deployments. It provided emergency support in

a wide range of emergencies, including natural disasters in Myanmar and China, and the conflict in Georgia. Emergency assistance continues to be provided in the complex situations in and around Iraq and Somalia.

The following steps have been taken in order to bring the response capacity up to the target of 500,000 people:

**Staffing:** The number of standby staff has been increased to 300 by including former Emergency Response Team members in a two-year roster for exceptional large-scale emergencies. UNHCR conducts four Workshops on Emergency Management (WEM) per year and maintains an active Emergency Response Team roster, which consists of 100 UNHCR and 30 partner staff. Combined with deployments of senior staff from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section, this constitutes the primary emergency response mechanism during the initial phase of new emergencies.

UNHCR also runs two sessions per year of the inter-agency Emergency Team Leadership Training Programme to strengthen the quality of leadership in humanitarian emergency operations, improve coordination among all actors, and foster the ongoing development of best practices in emergency leadership and management.

**eCentre:** The Regional Centre for Emergency Training in International Humanitarian Response in Japan, or eCentre, works to improve emergency preparedness and response in Asia and the Pacific, as well as improve staff safety by strengthening the operational capacity of relevant government departments, NGOs and UN agencies. The eCentre provides training in emergency response, contingency planning, international standards of protection, field safety, security risk management, media relations, stress management and training of trainers. It is a regional network of organizations and individuals that also prepares technical information on emergency preparedness and response. In 2009, it will pilot a distance learning module on security risk management, and organize workshops on security risk management and safety in the field. The workshops will aim to ensure a safe and sustainable response in emergencies. The eCentre will broaden partnerships and increase participation from outside the region, paying special attention to the needs of women and children.

**Non-food items and logistics:** UNHCR's Central Emergency Stockpiles (CES) in Dubai and Copenhagen cover the needs for basic non-food items (NFIs) for 500,000 people, such as plastic sheeting, kitchen sets, mosquito nets, jerry cans and buckets. The Office has lightweight emergency tents to cover the needs of 250,000 people. It is developing a winterized lightweight tent for cold environments. The stockpiles also include operational support items, such as armoured vehicles, trucks, generators and prefabricated warehouses that can be released immediately. UNHCR will consider prepositioning of non-food items in planning for potential emergencies to reduce transport costs and response time.

Due to the growing number of emergencies and UNHCR's increased involvement in natural disasters, the Office will augment the number of lightweight tents and armoured vehicles in its emergency stockpile.

UNHCR will seek additional external standby capacity and coordination for supplies and logistics, including regional and national capacity in standby agreements among NGOs, and through agreements with national civil defence departments.

**Operational support:** The Office will improve support modules and accommodation to meet designated minimum standards, and introduce better information and communications technology for immediate deployment with Emergency Response Teams.

**Management and emergency procedures:** UNHCR began to reinforce emergency management by compiling all emergency operations and management procedures

in a single document in 2008. UNHCR's *Emergency Handbook* was revised in 2008 and it is being translated into French. It will be printed in 2009, with additional translations foreseen.

## Early warning and preparedness

In 2008, UNHCR revised its Action Alerts early warning system. At the same time, the inter-agency working group on early warning/contingency planning began designing an inter-agency platform for early warning information to improve operational preparedness. A prototype is already in operation using indicators to track developments which might precipitate humanitarian crises. The project is spearheaded by leading researchers in the field of early warning.

Furthermore, the inter-agency working group on early warning/contingency planning launched an online contingency planning toolbox in June 2008. This allows UN Country Teams to improve skills in contingency planning. A training module is being prepared that will target country teams interested in this effort. So far this module has been used in Georgia, Kenya, Myanmar and South Africa. The goal is to streamline the contingency planning process, avoid duplication and gaps, and increase the efficiency of preparedness and response functions.

UNHCR has also reinforced its relationship with subregional organizations, with emphasis on early warning mechanisms in regional contexts. One example



A Burmese man repairs his roof with plastic sheeting after the cyclone in Yangon, Myanmar.

is the Office's cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States, which focuses on early warning and preparedness measurements.

UNHCR will maintain a financial allocation in the Operational Reserve for emergency activities. Resource allocation procedures for emergencies were revised in 2007 and implemented successfully in 2008. The new procedures bring authority closer to the field by empowering Representatives, Bureau Directors and the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) to reallocate resources in response to changing operational needs. They also improve operational flexibility by facilitating direct access to up to USD 10 million from the Operational Reserve, which is available for emergencies without reference to UNHCR's Budget Committee.

## Improving security for displaced people and staff

Ensuring the security of staff and the people of concern to UNHCR is a major element of the Office's emergency response. The humanitarian space in which it works has been eroded by armed actors, absence of the rule of law, and terrorism. These developments have compromised the safety of both displaced people and staff.

The importance of a comprehensive approach to improving security has been recognized by the international community, and UNHCR helps governments to fulfil their primary responsibilities in this regard. Efforts to strengthen national capacity to manage security issues include advocacy and activities in the areas of mine action, small arms and light weapons, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and interaction with national and international military forces. In 2009, UNHCR will enhance its cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and pay special attention to UN integrated missions.

UNHCR will cooperate with other actors to implement the recommendations in the Report of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security, which the Secretary-General commissioned following the December 2007 attack on UN premises in Algiers. Among the main concerns for UNHCR are effective ways to reaffirm humanitarian principles and ensure that security management enables, rather than restricts, the delivery of protection and assistance to people in need.

In cooperation with UN and NGO partners, UNHCR will continue to advocate for better protection of humanitarian workers while safeguarding access to beneficiaries. The Office will play an active role in the UN Security Management System and collaborate regularly with the UN Department of Safety and Security



Relief items are being sent from UNHCR's central emergency stockpile in Copenhagen to Georgia.

(UNDSS) and other partners in the Inter-Agency Security Management Network. UNHCR fully supports the UN Security Management System.

To improve the security of displaced people, UNHCR will develop special refugee and IDP “security packages”. An example of this is the deployment in 2008 of two refugee security liaison officers in Chad, which led to a better understanding among international peacekeepers of the needs, concerns and rights of forcibly displaced people. UNHCR is also increasing its cooperation with the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions of the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations in beneficiary security, disarmament, demobilization and mine action. This has helped to build capacity among national security and law institutions.

The Situational Emergency Training (SET), which was initiated at the request of UNHCR offices in countries prone to emergencies, targets mid-level managers and support staff with emergency experience. The Office also plans to train senior managers to prepare them for emergency deployment.

In 2009, UNHCR plans to hold four sessions of its Security Management Learning Programme. The programme targets mid-level managers, Representatives and Heads of Offices and focuses on security risk management, threat and risk assessment, security planning and critical-incident management.

In addition, safety and security will be an important component of the WEM in 2009. The safety and security component of the WEM includes personal security, hostage survival and mission planning. UNHCR has concluded an agreement with UNDSS under which the latter will recognize the security component of the WEM as equivalent to its own Safe and Secure Approaches to Field Environments training. The Office is also developing a crisis management training programme for managers.

By mid-2008, the majority of UNHCR offices were in compliance with the UN Minimum Operating Safety Standards (MOSS). The Office will continue to monitor global compliance while offering guidance and support to its operations around the world. Beginning in 2008, security assessments of offices have included a focus on

their vulnerability to explosions. UNHCR will also look at the safety and security component of the management of staff.

In 2009, UNHCR will strengthen its network of regional field security advisers. It will also increase the number of qualified staff who can be deployed at short notice, while maintaining a core group of field security advisers for shorter-term duties. The Office will also advocate for the decentralization of parts of UNDSS.

Planning and budgeting for the timely implementation of risk reduction measures are essential to security. In 2009, UNHCR will improve the tracking of security-related budgeting. In 2008, a global office-vulnerability assessment generated specific recommendations and calculated the resource requirements for a comprehensive response. The implementation of the recommendations will be monitored closely in 2009.

## Emergency projects

In 2009, UNHCR will implement a series of global programmes to support the rapid deployment of human and financial resources, basic emergency items, telecommunications equipment and other essential assets in emergency operations.

Through these programmes, UNHCR will ensure:

- The swift despatch of basic supplies at the onset of an emergency through the immediate allocation of up to USD 1 million from a revolving fund.
- The availability of basic emergency relief items for 500,000 people, as well as prefabricated warehouses, generators and solar systems, light vehicles and trucks.
- Proper warehousing, full insurance coverage, and the repair, maintenance and replacement of items and assets in the Central Emergency Stockpiles.
- The availability of human resources by strengthening the emergency capacity of UNHCR staff, government counterparts, NGOs and other UN agencies.
- The improvement of UNHCR's early warning system through careful analysis of potential and existing crisis situations.