

ANNUAL TRIPARTITE CONSULTATIONS ON RESETTLEMENT
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Opening Statement
Ms. Eva Demant, Chief, Resettlement Section

Dear colleagues,

I would like to update you on key resettlement activities implemented by UNHCR, in cooperation with resettlement partners, since the last ATC took place in June 2005.

During the past year, UNHCR has continued its efforts to expand the use of resettlement as a tool of protection, as a durable solution and as a burden and responsibility sharing mechanism, for example by further diversifying the nationalities of refugees being resettled and the number of asylum countries from where resettlement takes place.

In 2005, UNHCR facilitated the resettlement departures of more than 38,500 refugees involving 62 nationalities, 68 countries of asylum and 23 destination countries. Actual submissions were made to 25 destination countries from 74 asylum countries, involving 73 nationalities.

One concrete outcome of these efforts was the Emergency Resettlement Operation for Uzbek refugees initiated in July 2005, following the events in Andijan in May last year, which resulted in the humanitarian evacuation of 439 refugees from Kyrgyzstan to Romania and their subsequent resettlement to third countries.

Today 7 cases / 44 persons remain in Romania. It is hoped that all of these refugees will have found a durable solution by the end of July. Of the 29 Uzbek refugees in detention in Kyrgyzstan, 25 have been resettled, while four remain in detention and efforts continue to secure their release.

On behalf of UNHCR, I would like to take this opportunity to again thank all countries involved in this truly multilateral operation, which is an example of solidarity and burden and responsibility sharing by the international community. UNHCR is also encouraged by the resettlement of a number of emergency cases in Morocco to two Western European countries early this year.

The methodology for the resettlement of groups continued to be used in the Field, mainly in Africa, the Middle East and Central and Eastern Asia.

It is worth highlighting that since 2004, 13 refugee groups (totaling approximately 43,000 persons) have been submitted for resettlement consideration.

These groups include Liberian refugees in Guinea and Sierra Leone, Somali and Sudanese refugees in Kenya, Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, Congolese refugee survivors of the Gatumba massacre in Burundi, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, Eritrean refugees in Saudi Arabia, and Myanmar refugees in Thailand.

These group resettlement exercises illustrate the consolidation of the group resettlement methodology worldwide and the significant expansion of resettlement activities, particularly in Asia, during the last two years.

At the start of its chairmanship in June last year, Norway announced that enhancing the strategic use of resettlement, particularly in protracted refugee situations, would continue to be a high priority for the Working Group on Resettlement. The Working Group and particularly the established "Core Group on Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal" are working also this evening to find comprehensive durable solutions for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal by *inter alia* using resettlement strategically. We will receive an update on these efforts tomorrow.

At UNHCR Headquarters linkages with interlocutors in the Regional Bureaux were further strengthened through the continuation of monthly meetings allowing for improved communication on policy and procedural developments as well as an increased understanding of and cooperation on resettlement activities.

Regional coordination and planning were further improved through the consolidation of the two Regional Resettlement Hubs in Nairobi and Accra and the establishment of a Regional Resettlement Hub in Beirut in December 2005. These links were further strengthened as a result of annual regional strategic planning meetings held in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

The Regional Resettlement Hubs have played and continue to play an instrumental role in UNHCR's efforts to expand and harmonize resettlement activities. For instance, in 2005, the Nairobi Hub submitted a total of 1,898 cases / 7,018 persons, which represents a 74, 8 % increase compared with the number of resettlement submissions made by the Nairobi Hub in 2004.

Ensuring the integrity of resettlement continued to be a priority for UNHCR. The UNHCR Resettlement Anti-Fraud Plan of Action recommends a dedicated staff position to coordinate its implementation. Such a position was created and filled in August 2005 and aims to upgrade field offices' capacity to prevent and mitigate fraud in the resettlement process. We will hear more about this later today. We would like to thank Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, for their contributions to funding the position and the activities linked to the implementation of the Plan of Action.

Steps were also taken to further develop practical tools such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on resettlement and risk assessment frameworks in field operations, with the aim to enhance the integrity of protection and resettlement delivery.

To date, approximately 80 per cent of the field offices involved in resettlement operations around the world have completed SOPs on resettlement. Further development of global baseline SOPs commenced and will continue into 2006-2007 in line with procedures for use of the proGres database and the electronic transfer of resettlement submissions.

As part of the continued efforts to further develop and disseminate policy, standards and guidelines on resettlement, training activities were undertaken to broaden the knowledge base of staff in the Field in terms of identification and processing methodologies and improved quality assurance and compliance systems.

Two regional UNHCR policy workshops on "Identification of refugees in need of resettlement" were organized in New Delhi and Nairobi benefiting 55 UNHCR staff members. We will also hear more about this later today.

In addition, three workshops that form part of the Refugee Status Determination-Resettlement Learning Program (RSD-RS LP) were held in Africa and Asia, providing training for a total of 71 UNHCR staff.

UNHCR also organized and facilitated, together with ICMC, a training workshop on refugee status determination, resettlement and management of protection activities for roster members under the UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme. The objective of such training is to improve organizational understanding prior to deployment and ensure resettlement delivery in compliance with UNHCR standards.

Partnerships with resettlement countries continued through the Working Group on Resettlement and through bilateral meetings. UNHCR also continued to work on ways to strengthen partnerships with NGOs and to enhance their role in resettlement.

The UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme is an example of such a partnership, which has proved to be an important mechanism to support field resettlement operations and enhance UNHCR's capacity to identify and refer refugees for resettlement.

In 2005, 63 deployments were supported through the Scheme to 32 UNHCR offices in 35 countries on three continents, the majority being in Africa. Other deployments were equally distributed in Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The success of this initiative is linked to the continuing support by resettlement countries, which provide a substantial part of the funds for the programme. Without the special contributions from Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States the UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme would have had to have been significantly reduced this year given UNHCR's financial crisis and the subsequent austerity measures.

In November last year, UNHCR reviewed the UNHCR-ICMC Framework Agreement and we are currently in the process of revising - together with ICMC - its practical implementation to ensure that the Scheme is sufficiently flexible to allow for a more practical and diverse engagement of NGOs in resettlement operations, as recommended at the UNHCR-NGO Workshop that took place in Washington in March 2005. One of the ongoing activities is the creation of sub-rosters within the ICMC roster, including one for BID/child welfare specialists.

Efforts continued to expand resettlement opportunities and broaden the base of resettlement by engaging more States in considering the establishment of resettlement programmes.

The proposal by the European Commission to consider the establishment of an EU-wide Resettlement Scheme is an example of a positive development in this area.

In July 2005, UNHCR actively participated in an EU seminar on resettlement hosted by the United Kingdom. The main objective of the seminar was to promote discussion amongst EU Member States on the key principles, benefits and potential challenges of resettlement.

The seminar also looked at different models of resettlement and encouraged the expansion of the use of resettlement either through new national programmes or through the establishment of an EU-wide Resettlement Scheme.

A resettlement meeting held in Ecuador in early February 2006, to pursue the implementation of the Solidarity Resettlement component of the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action, offered an excellent opportunity to deepen multilateral cooperation on resettlement and increase the number of resettlement countries.

The Quito meeting resulted in a number of conclusions and recommendations that UNHCR has translated into a “roadmap”. The “roadmap”, which contains a series of concrete project proposals in Latin America, has been shared with donor countries for their consideration and support. However, the implementation of the resettlement component of the Mexico Plan of Action will be in jeopardy if funding is not made available. The Americas Bureau will provide further details in this regard tomorrow.

A number of countries interested in resettlement attended the last meeting of the Working Group on Resettlement in March-. This is the first time that non-resettlement countries have been invited as observers to attend a regular Working Group on Resettlement meeting.

These countries have also been invited to attend this meeting of the ATC, where the dialogue with potential resettlement countries will continue.

Continued donor support for resettlement in 2005-2006 has enabled UNHCR to sustain its commitment to strengthen operational capacity to address global resettlement needs and UNHCR is most appreciative to the resettlement countries which provide additional resettlement funding to UNHCR in support of resettlement activities.

These contributions have boosted UNHCR’s resettlement capacity through the funding of temporary resettlement positions and the UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme and providing government secondments. They have also enabled UNHCR to engage in important activities such as the establishment of a Protection Clinic for urban, refugee women in New Delhi, training activities, resettlement fraud prevention and mitigation and the processing of refugee groups.

The establishment of the Resettlement Service is a concrete example of UNHCR’s commitment to strengthen protection and to upgrade the resettlement function within UNHCR. However, expanding or even maintaining the current resettlement capacity is a major challenge for UNHCR in the current financial environment and will require the sustained commitment from donors.

This is my last ATC, in my capacity of Chief of the Resettlement Section. My assignment ends next Friday. I would like to take this opportunity to thank to you all, partners and colleagues from resettlement countries, NGOs, and IOM for the cooperation and support that the Section and UNHCR have enjoyed during these 4 years. I wish you all the best in our joint efforts to ensure resettlement for the many refugees in need of this solution.

Thank you.