

A newly arrived family of Somali refugees walks to the tent that will be its new home in Burumino refugee camp, Ethiopia.



# Reinforcing our Commitment to Protect

by António Guterres

UNITED NATIONS  
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**I**N 2012, WE WITNESSED A SERIES OF REFUGEE CRISES unparalleled in UNHCR's recent history. These had a dramatic impact on the lives of those forced to flee in search of refuge, on the countries which received them, and on the communities who generously hosted them. More than 700,000 people fled across borders in the first nine months of 2012, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. This has placed huge demands on UNHCR's resources and those of our partners. Coming on top of a series of major refugee crises in 2011 – in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, and Somalia – and as we continue to attend to the plight of millions of refugees living in protracted situations, we are now at a critical moment. Our collective capacity to respond to the suffering of those uprooted by conflict and persecution is being put to the test in unforeseen ways.

**T**HE RECENT SERIES of refugee emergencies has nonetheless underscored that the right to asylum remains a core common value. States have kept their borders open and respected the principle of *non-refoulement*, despite the dramatic social and economic impact of large-scale refugee arrivals, at the same time as these countries strive to manage the political and security implications of a conflict so close to their borders. Their generosity should not be underestimated. But upholding and preserving the right to asylum requires strong, timely and sustained international solidarity, in the form of financial, technical and political support.

The surge in refugee emergencies in 2011 and 2012 occurred in the context of a global economic crisis. Despite this, UNHCR's donors have given significant and consistent support to our operations, for which we are enormously grateful. We are predicting a level of voluntary contributions for 2012 similar in dollar terms to 2011, which is a profound statement of the commitment of our donors to upholding the rights of the world's displaced and stateless people, and addressing the human suffering that displacement brings.

But we are now at a moment when the demands upon UNHCR are rising, while the means available to respond have remained at the same level. For several years until early

regular operations, whilst maintaining the capacity to respond to new emergencies. In today's unpredictable operating environment, this is a matter of deep concern.

In the course of 2012, we undertook a series of reviews to ensure the most responsible and efficient use of our resources. During the first nine months, we took measures to achieve some USD 60 million in additional savings at Headquarters and in our regular operations, and diverted these to new emergencies. We took care to ensure that our investment in life-saving services and key protection priorities was not affected, and that our commitments to partners were maintained. We also undertook a robust review of procurement plans, and placed controls on stockpile replenishment. In 2013, we will undertake a limited workforce reduction, and will continue to apply cost-saving measures.

**T**HE CURRENT CRISES have highlighted the value of our multi-year investment in institutional reforms, aimed at improving our organizational performance, efficiency and delivery. These have enabled us to drive down costs and ensure a streamlined Headquarters, with a sharper focus on strategic direction, accountability and control, and strengthened operational capacity in the Field. We are now investing significantly in measures to

## “ **UNEARMARKED FUNDS ARE CRITICAL... TO PRIORITIZE COMPELLING PROTECTION NEEDS.** ”

2011, the major emergencies primarily involved natural disasters, or internal displacement crises caused by conflict, in which UNHCR's contribution formed part of a broader inter-agency commitment under the cluster approach. Today, however, the succession of refugee crises described above has placed unprecedented demands on our human and financial resources.

**I**N THE EMERGENCIES of 2011 and 2012, the distinct responsibilities attached to our refugee mandate require us to assume the global coordination role, and to step in as provider of last resort if all else fails. Even with a conservative estimate of remaining needs for the last quarter of 2012, our total expenditure will exceed last year's, while the means available to respond have remained the same. In 2013, we will have to continue to manage the ongoing implications of the recent crises alongside our

improve our capacity for financial management and programme oversight, to professionalize our approach to risk management, and to place accountability at the heart of our operations.

The value of unearmarked funding has also become increasingly apparent. Unearmarked funds are critical in enabling us to prioritize compelling protection needs which might otherwise go uncovered, and give us the flexibility to respond swiftly to new emergencies. Only 13 per cent of unearmarked funds were spent on headquarters costs in 2011, and the largest proportion was spent in Africa.

**A**S WE STRIVE to manage the implications of the new emergencies, we have also sought to maintain our commitment to a number of key pillars of our global operations, and to ensure that long-term investments in these are reinforced and sustained.



**The High Commissioner and US Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard visit Malian refugees in Damba camp, Burkina Faso.**

UNHCR / H. CAUZY / BFA/2012

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE

First, our ability to react to new crises has substantially rested on the series of measures undertaken in the last three years to strengthen our emergency preparedness and response capacity and our supply function. The concept of corporate responsibility for emergencies has now been embedded throughout the organization, as described in the *Responding to Emergencies* chapter. This will remain a key priority in the coming year.

### PROTECTION

Second, we will continue to work to reinforce UNHCR's own protection capacity, and that of the international protection system. There has been an increase of 70 per cent in the number of UNHCR protection positions worldwide since 2005, and protection staff now constitute 26 per cent of our workforce, against 19 per cent seven years ago.

We will continue to invest in a number of key protection priorities in 2013, including the roll-out of our updated strategy on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence, our new child protection framework, and implementing our new five-year education strategy. We will also seek to maintain our commitment to implementing our urban refugee policy.

The ministerial-level meeting held in December 2011 to commemorate the anniversaries of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Statelessness Convention was a landmark event, the impact of which will become increasingly visible over time. Ninety-two States made pledges in relation to refugees and asylum-seekers, including on durable solutions, and 22 on the protection of the internally displaced. A number of States, led by Norway and Switzerland, also undertook to initiate a global debate on how

to address protection gaps in relation to cross-border displacement linked to sudden-onset disasters, including those triggered by climate change. And very significantly, 61 States made pledges in relation to statelessness, which has led to a series of accessions to the Statelessness Conventions already this year.

Looking ahead, UNHCR will continue to work with States on the implementation of their pledges, and on addressing other critical protection gaps. We have just issued updated guidelines on detention, which emphasize that this should be used only as a last resort, and we will work closely with States to promote their application. We would also like to launch a process of consultation with States on the concept of temporary protection, to explore further its potential role in addressing contemporary cross-border protection challenges.

### PARTNERSHIP

Third, we will continue to invest in partnership, which remains a cornerstone of UNHCR's work, as outlined in the *Working in Partnership* chapter. We will remain actively engaged in the development of the Transformative Agenda, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and maintain our commitment to the enhanced responsibilities we have assumed in relation to the protection of the internally displaced, within the framework of the inter-agency cluster approach.

In 2012, despite the growing number of refugee emergencies, we were able to devote an increased volume of unearmarked funding to operations for the internally displaced. Our responsibilities for refugees are qualitatively different from those for internally displaced people, because of the nature of UNHCR's mandate for refugees and their distinct status in international law.

**Sudanese refugees from Blue Nile state queue up for blankets and mosquito nets in Yusuf Batil camp in South Sudan.**

For the internally displaced, the primary responsibility lies with States, and our role is part of a shared inter-agency commitment under the cluster approach. This sometimes leads to very difficult dilemmas, at a time when our resources are insufficient to cover all the demands on us. But ultimately, our decisions must be driven by the overarching imperative of responding to the most acute needs. Human dignity is not dependent on status.

We will also continue to seek synergies between refugee coordination mechanisms under UNHCR's leadership and broader humanitarian coordination, as for example, in the Syria and Mali crises, and to explore opportunities for our partners to play a stronger and more predictable role in planning, coordination and delivery in refugee emergencies.

**PROTRACTED SITUATIONS**

Fourth, the demands of the new refugee emergencies will not deflect our attention from the pursuit of solutions to protracted displacement. We cannot abandon people living in despair because their plight is less visible or seemingly less dramatic than those fleeing new crises. Solutions to displacement ultimately lie in the political arena, through the resolution of conflict – a task which lies beyond the mandate of humanitarian actors. But much can be done to advance the prospect of solutions from the early stages of an emergency, including through conflict-sensitive approaches in our own operations, advocacy to highlight the humanitarian consequences of a conflict escalation, early investment in self-reliance, and the use of cash and voucher-based support mechanisms which empower displaced people to determine and address their own priority needs.

We also have to remain ready to respond to windows of opportunity, especially for voluntary repatriation. The majority of those who fled the Côte d'Ivoire crisis in early 2011 have already returned home, and I hope that positive developments in Myanmar and Somalia will also start to pave the way towards solutions for refugees from those countries.

The chapter on *Finding durable solutions* analyses a number of positive recent developments in relation to solutions and sets out how we will further pursue these in 2013. We continue to invest in deepening our partnerships with host Governments and development actors, including through the Transitional Solutions Initiative, comprehensive solutions strategies





in West Africa and the Great Lakes, a Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, and a regional plan for the western Balkans. We will also continue to explore complementary approaches to the traditional durable solutions, including through temporary migration and other mobility-related initiatives. We remain extremely grateful to the 26 States who continue to accept refugees for third-country resettlement.

At a moment when resources are stretched, finding the right balance between investing in solutions and responding to new emergencies is an extremely complex challenge, and inevitably, where lives are at risk, saving lives will always take priority. But it would be a tragic mistake to allow our collective commitment to solutions to lose momentum – both because of the impact it would have on the lives of those living in protracted displacement, and because ultimately, early investment in solutions brings less human and financial costs in the long run.

#### STAFF SAFETY

Fifth, we will continue to prioritize measures to enable our staff to operate safely. Tragically, two UNHCR staff lost their lives in 2012, in Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Today's aid workers are exposed to increasing insecurity – in part because of the indiscriminate nature of violence, and in part because of the changing nature of conflict, in which criminal motivations and radical foreign-sponsored ideologies become entwined with political aspirations. We continue to invest in protective hardware and equipment, in staff training, and in ensuring that our cohort of field safety staff has the necessary analytical and communication skills. But the best way to ensure staff safety is by cultivating positive relationships with the communities we serve, by adhering to the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality, and by preserving the independence of our work from political agendas.

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**L**OOKING AHEAD, it is almost certain that new crises will continue to emerge in the months and years ahead. Unfortunately the international community is showing very limited capacity for the prevention and timely resolution of conflict, and as a result, new crises multiply and chronic ones persist. Against this backdrop, international solidarity to address the human consequences of conflict, and to ensure protection for those fleeing in search of refuge, is needed more than ever. ■

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