

**Side Event to the 60th Session of
the Executive Committee**



UNHCR/E Denholm

Humanitarian Space and Human Security

**Panel discussion moderated by the
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Mr. António Guterres**

Speakers

Mr. Adoum Moustapha Brahim
Governor of the Ouaddai Region
Chad

Mr. Bogdan Aurescu
Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Romania

**Tuesday, 29 September
13:30-15:00
Palais des Nations, Room XXIII**

CONCEPT NOTE

“Humanitarian Space and Human Security”

A Side Event on the theme of Humanitarian Space and Human Security for persons of concern will be organized on 29 September 2009, during the 60th session of the Executive Committee.

Physical safety represents the most urgent and compelling aspect of protection. Yet, safety issues are often addressed on an *ad hoc* basis and are rarely apprehended in a holistic manner. The challenge of ensuring physical safety extends from broader humanitarian space issues affecting entire populations or groups, particularly in conflict situations, to individual cases at risk of *refoulement*, torture and disappearance. This highly complex subject will be presented from three different angles, taking into account recent trends:

Humanitarian space is defined as the social, political and security operating environment, which allows for unimpeded access to protection and assistance. The access of affected populations to humanitarian assistance, and of humanitarian workers to such populations, affects the level of protection and degree of physical safety that people of concern can rely on. A number of factors have an impact on humanitarian space, ranging from the manipulation and targeting of aid workers for political, military or criminal purposes; the perceptions of bias of humanitarian workers in highly polarized environments; and sometimes blurred lines between humanitarian and political actors in the context of integrated peace-keeping missions. The erosion of humanitarian space exposes civilian populations to direct and indiscriminate threats to their physical safety and rights.

The **security of populations of concern** to the Office has become more tenuous as humanitarian space has contracted. Refugees are frequently hosted in areas not far from the conflicts which drove them from their homes, and in environments which represent diverse threats to their physical safety. These range from simple criminality to sexual abuse, forced recruitment and targeted killings. In some cases, host governments lack the means to ensure the security of these populations, a situation frequently abetted by the proliferation of armed, non-state actors in the refugee areas. In such situations, humanitarian organizations attempt to counter these threats with measures such as securing fencing for family shelters, distributing cooking fuel (minimizing the exposure of women to rape as they gather firewood), and establishing teams of security personnel to guard vulnerable camps. The challenges are complex, given the increased involvement of humanitarian organizations with internally displaced populations over the past few years.

At times, the only solution for certain groups of refugees may be resettlement to a third country. Threats to the physical safety of refugees, the risks of *refoulement*, and other acute protection problems such as prolonged detention in inhumane conditions, as well as particularly sensitive or high-profile cases, have increasingly forced UNHCR to resort to emergency resettlement. Unfortunately, most States have limited emergency capacity and resettlement processing times can be lengthy. In the past UNHCR has responded to such situations by arranging for *ad hoc* **evacuation**. However, the need for a predictable and sustainable response mechanism was clear. Romania has responded to this protection gap by establishing a stand-by capacity for the temporary relocation of up to 200 refugees with emergency needs, on a revolving basis pending onward resettlement to a third country. This represents a tangible form of burden-sharing and enables resettlement countries to conduct interviews in a stable and secure environment.

This Side Event will serve as a forum to mobilize stakeholders around the issue of humanitarian space and human security and discuss creative approaches. See reverse side for timing and further details.