

TODAY AT THE GA

PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES

8/9 NOVEMBER 2007

THIRD COMMITTEE DEBATE

42: Report of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Speakers

Portugal (on behalf of the EU)
DRC (on behalf of the SADEC)

Japan

Sudan

Columbia

China

Egypt

Russia

US

Switzerland

Norway

Afghanistan

Belarus

Côte d'Ivoire

Canada

Serbia

Marocco

Yemen

South Africa

Kenya

India

Armenia

United Republic of Tanzania

Republic of Korea

Uganda

Algeria

Ukraine

Georgia

Syrian Arab Republic

Kuwait

Iran

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Thailand

IOM

ICRC

IFRC

Holy See

Summary

Poverty is a primary driver of displacement, with thousands of poor migrants resorting to illegal and increasingly desperate routes to the global economy, said Mr. António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees in his presentation of the annual report of UNHCR to the General Assembly.

Natural disasters are also occurring with greater frequency and magnitude. And while it is impossible to foresee the long-term effects of climate change, rising sea levels will only mean millions more displaced.

He explained that while UNHCR has a precise mandate in relation to refugees, the complexity of today's displacement goes well beyond the asylum-migration nexus. More and more people are forced to move because of extreme deprivation, environmental degradation, climate change as well as conflict and persecution. Meeting the needs of people who have left their country to find food and sending them back to extreme deprivation if they are not refugees are some of the complex questions that arise. While the answers go beyond UNHCR's mandate, it is UNHCR's duty to alert states to these problems and help find answers to the new challenges they represent.

At the close of 2006, the global figure of persons of concern to UNHCR stood at 32.9 million. In cooperation with partners, notably through the protection cluster, UNHCR is now present in 24 countries with a total population of nearly 20 million internally displaced people (IDPs).

At the End of 2006, after several years of steady decline, the number of refugees worldwide rose to nearly 10 million. Today, **Iraqis** in and outside the country make up the biggest single group of displaced. The heavy burden placed by these refugees on the economies and societies of the neighboring **Syrian Arab Republic** and the **Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan** underscore the pressing need for greater international solidarity to assist them.

Assistance means not only solutions for return, as some refugees do not or cannot return home, but finding ways to integrate refugees locally. It was in this area that UNHCR has made significant advances together with the governments of **Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia** and the **United Republic of Tanzania** in 2006.

Mr. Guterres also explained that UNHCR's priority in 2006 was to strengthen refugee resettlement capacity, in particular with protracted situations like the Bhutanese in **Nepal**, Eritreans in eastern **Sudan** and Myanmar refugees in **Thailand**. He reported that after substantially increasing the number of resettlement submissions last year (2006: 54'000), UNHCR is on pace to surpass the number in 2007 again.

Highlights

On **Sudan's** intervention regarding the abduction of a 100 children by a French NGO, the High Commissioner stated that his deputy was currently in Sudan drafting a joint statement to condemn this regrettable and unacceptable incident. In collaboration with WFP and UNICEF, UNHCR is identifying the families of the children and preparing their safe return.

Iraq asked the High Commissioner about the limited presence of international personal in light of the magnitude of displacement problem. As the security conditions in Iraq are still worrisome and forced return is not an option, Mr. Guterres underlined that he will continue to urge neighboring countries of Iraq to preserve the asylum space and strongly encourages Iraq to collaborate closely with Syria and Jordan.

Georgia underlines its efforts to find a peaceful and durable solution for its IDPs from Abkhazia and stressed that the right to return is inalienable. Mr. Guterres highlighted that even though the right to return was still valid for the long term displaced, persons concerned shall not live in scarce conditions during their displacement and therefore congratulated Georgia to address this issue by adopting a national strategy on IDPs. However, only political will will finally put an end to the displacement crisis. But this would be beyond the mandate of the UNHCR and requires national governments to seek for political solutions.

Egypt welcomes the efforts of the UNHCR to alleviate the plight of displaced persons. However, an institutional coordination is required among agencies involved. In view of the magnitude of the problem, the issue of internal displacement should be dealt with through distinct mechanisms. In response, the Commissioner stresses that the UNHCR make a clear distinction between refugees and IDPs. Refugees are at the core of UNHCR's mandate and governed by the legal framework of international law. When it comes to internal displacement the role of national governments is of primary importance and UNHCR acts within the framework of collective efforts and coordination mostly through the cluster approach.