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Background Paper
Asia-Pacific Regional Session

Wednesday 29 June 2011, 09:00 - 10:45, Room 2

Partnerships and solutions for protracted refugee situations

Last year, the Asia-Pacific regional session focused on the importance of building new and innovative national partnerships in overcoming some of the key challenges that UNHCR faces in the Asia-Pacific region, namely, the shrinking of humanitarian space in general, including the erosion of protection and asylum space particularly in mixed migration and urban contexts; and the implications of UNHCR's predictable involvement in natural disasters. Another important challenge in the Asia-Pacific is the existence of major protracted refugee situations, and taking advantage of the presence of NGOs from countries hosting large number of refugees for protracted periods, this year's session will focus on the situation of protracted refugee situations and the importance local partnerships to attain local solutions, pending a durable solution.

Today, the Asia-Pacific region is hosting more than 3.5 million refugees, many of whom are in situations of protracted displacement. Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran currently host 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees, including some who have been there for over 30 years, constituting one of the largest protracted refugee populations in the world; and UNHCR's refugee operations in Bangladesh and Nepal, and along the Thailand-Myanmar border, are now over 20 years old. Finding durable solutions for protracted refugee situations in Asia remains a priority. These concern particularly the Afghan refugee situation in **Pakistan and Iran**; the situation of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in **Bangladesh**; the Myanmar refugees in **Thailand and in Malaysia**; and the refugees from Bhutan in **Nepal**.

UNHCR in Asia is promoting community-based approaches to improve the services available in refugee-hosting communities and ensure refugees' access to those services, and to encourage peaceful co-existence between refugees and their hosts, pending a durable solution. This approach would contribute to preserving asylum space while addressing host community fatigue, and help stabilize the refugee population where they are, discouraging irregular secondary movements. Examples of this approach are the **Refugee-Affected and Hosting Area Programme (RAHA) in Pakistan**, the **Community-Based Development Programme in Nepal**, and the **UN Joint Initiative in Bangladesh**. We are exploring with Government and the UN Country Team to apply this approach also to **Iran**. These approaches aim at pursuing local solutions and partnerships with development actors is crucial.

The session will explore how strengthened partnerships can contribute to local solutions to protracted refugee situations, and exchange best practices.