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Update on UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific - 2011

A. Situational analysis including new developments

The Asia-Pacific region is home to more than 3.5 million refugees, the majority living in protracted situations. This figure includes 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, many of whom have been living in exile for over 30 years. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Thailand have also been hosting large numbers of refugees for more than 20 years.

Finding solutions for these refugees continues to be both a challenge and a priority for UNHCR. These protracted situations not only have an impact on the host countries but also on the region, as refugees increasingly move onward to other countries in the hope of finding better protection, as well as livelihood and other opportunities. Refugees and asylum-seekers form part of complex mixed migratory movements, often involving transnational agents including people smugglers, giving rise to a number of serious protection concerns.

While working to achieve durable solutions for these protracted refugee situations, the Office is also focused on enhancing protection and asylum space in the region. This includes improving protection and conditions of stay, which discourage onward movements. Livelihood strategies and host community support are critical elements of this effort. UNHCR is also working with States, including through the Bali Process and the Almaty Process, to establish protection-sensitive entry systems and explore alternative regulatory and stay arrangements. Developing comprehensive regional approaches, which involve countries of origin, transit and destination, is an important objective that presents both challenges and opportunities.

B. Progress made and challenges encountered in achieving strategic priorities

Safeguarding protection and asylum space, including in mixed-migration contexts and urban settings

At the Fourth Regional Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process held on 30 March 2011, States agreed to the development of an inclusive but non-binding Regional Cooperation Framework (RCF) to initially address selected caseloads. UNHCR is working with the Bali Process Ad Hoc Group members and other interested countries to operationalize the RCF. This includes providing support and pooled resources to facilitate State response to mixed movements in the areas of processing and case management, resettlement, and return to countries of origin.

In March 2011, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia

(UNRCCA), co-organized the *Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in Central Asia*, which took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan. More than 100 representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan attended the event. The objectives of the Regional Conference, which was held largely at the ministerial level, were to increase the understanding of the nature, scale and reasons for mixed migratory movements in Central Asia and the wider region, and to agree on the development of a comprehensive, cooperative regional strategy on how to address this phenomenon in a protection-sensitive manner. Participating States adopted the "Almaty Declaration", which will serve as a platform for further cooperation, dialogue and follow-up action.

Both the Bali Process and the Almaty Process constitute two key platforms in the Asia-Pacific region, through which UNHCR advocates for a systematic and more predictable response to mixed migration while ensuring protection-sensitive policies and procedures.

The largest urban refugee populations in Asia can be found in India and Malaysia. UNHCR is encouraged by Malaysia's migration management programme, which may allow for the regularization of stay for all refugees in the country, as well as afford them the right to work, and stands ready to support this initiative. There have also been positive developments in India whereby protection for asylum-seekers has been enhanced through efficient refugee status determination (RSD) and registration systems, as well as awareness-raising activities.

Finding solutions for protracted refugee situations

UNHCR is developing a Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for the Afghan refugee situation, in cooperation with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This involves: facilitating voluntary repatriation through enhanced and targeted community-based reintegration interventions in return areas (referred to as Reintegration Plus); working through ongoing national and regional migration processes to regulate mixed migratory flows; and exploring options for temporary stay arrangements in the two host countries, on the understanding that voluntary repatriation remains the preferred solution. Integral to this strategy are efforts to find solutions for refugees at risk and enhance coexistence through targeted interventions in health, education and livelihoods which benefit the host communities. The Comprehensive Solutions Strategy will be presented during a stakeholders' conference in early 2012 which will draw up a multi-year roadmap on the strategies, partnerships and resources required.

In Pakistan, the Government's Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees adopted in 2010 has facilitated comprehensive durable solutions for Afghan refugees in the country. The Strategy provides for, inter alia, alternative stay arrangements for different categories of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, including skilled and unskilled workers and their families, students and female-headed households. The Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) programme is also an integral component of the Strategy, which supports host communities and preserves asylum space for Afghan refugees for whom return is not yet a viable option.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has developed a health insurance scheme for registered refugees residing in the country. The need for medical insurance has been a recurring theme in recent participatory assessments with refugees. The insurance scheme, which began on 1 July 2011, is linked to a new Amayesh "smart card" for registered refugees, which has been developed by the Government. More programmes in the areas of education and livelihoods are also being envisaged in the Islamic Republic of Iran to enhance the skills of Afghan refugees.

The resettlement programme launched four years ago to resettle Bhutanese refugees from the camps in eastern Nepal passed the 50,000 mark on 1 August 2011. The

total camp population has gone down from some 108,000 to some 63,000 refugees, and the remaining population will be reduced to some 44,000 by the end of 2012. UNHCR is working to mobilize support within the United Nations and from donors, to support the introduction of a community-based development programme in refugee hosting areas. It is envisaged that the programme will be launched early next year. The Office hopes that consolidation of the original seven camps into two camps will be completed by the end of 2012.

Ensuring protection and durable solutions for IDPs

Following major humanitarian crises that hit the region in 2010, namely the devastating floods in Pakistan and the ethnic violence which erupted in Kyrgyzstan in June, UNHCR worked to ensure a smooth transition to the recovery phase, in close collaboration with relevant actors. In Pakistan, the emergency phase of the response ended in early 2011, by which time UNHCR had provided over 2 million people with emergency shelter and non-food items (NFIs). With the early recovery phase well underway, the Office is focusing its activities on protection and leads the Protection Working Group. UNHCR's involvement in the flood response will end in December 2011.

UNHCR continues to provide humanitarian assistance in Pakistan to over 400,000 people displaced as a result of conflict, primarily from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). UNHCR is supporting Government efforts in the areas of registration, camp management, host community support, and protection for the most vulnerable populations. The Office is also supporting the Government in developing a national policy framework for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In Kyrgyzstan, following the delivery of life-saving emergency relief and implementation of a shelter project that provided over 13,400 persons with transitional shelter before the onset of winter last year, UNHCR continues to implement important protection and assistance activities including in relation to the rule of law and reconciliation. The Office has received support from the UN Peacebuilding Fund for these activities for 2011-2012.

In the Philippines, UNHCR launched an operation to support IDPs in Mindanao in 2010 and has played a catalytic role in helping establish a common inter-agency platform to mobilize funds for the population. The Office's involvement aims to reinforce national protection mechanisms by strengthening the capacity of the authorities to assist and protect IDPs. UNHCR has been implementing Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in IDP returnee communities, which serves as an effective protection tool to monitor their situation.

Over the past two years UNHCR has assisted over 212,000 IDPs, who were displaced in Sri Lanka after April 2008, to return, leaving some 9,300 IDPs in camps, host communities or other locations. UNHCR continues to advocate for durable solutions for some 94,000 IDPs displaced during the earlier phases of the conflict, prior to April 2008. As the Office is phasing down its IDP operation, it is gearing up for increased refugee returns. As of end-August, more than 1,400 Sri Lankan refugees had returned with the help of UNHCR since the start of 2011, compared to some 970 individuals in the same period last year.

Reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless persons

Tangible progress has been achieved on statelessness issues in central Asia where UNHCR works at both the national and regional levels. Following the Government of Turkmenistan's consent to implement the Action Plan for Joint Activities on Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness in December 2010, some 8,000 undocumented persons have been registered through a joint countrywide exercise carried out by UNHCR and the Turkmenistan State Migration Service. Some 1,590 stateless persons who were registered in earlier Government registration drives were granted Turkmen citizenship in July 2011. The Turkmen Parliament recently approved a bill to allow it to accede to the 1954 Statelessness Convention, and accession to the 1961 Convention is under consideration.

UNHCR continues to cooperate closely with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). Future cooperation is being explored and may include a number of initiatives to address statelessness in the region, including awareness raising.

In September 2011, the Philippines ratified the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. The Office is supporting the Government in reviewing the domestic legal framework to assess the extent to which it is already in harmony with the substantive provisions of this instrument.

C. Financial information

The approved initial 2011 budget of US\$ 427 million for Asia and the Pacific has increased to \$563 million as of mid-August, mainly due to the continuation of the Supplementary Budgets (SBs) for the flood operation in Pakistan and the IDP operation in Kyrgyzstan based on earmarked contributions. It is expected that both operations will be concluded by the end of 2011. The budget, although limited in amount, has also been increased to improve protection capacity in several key countries as well as to cover unforeseen activities in the region, such as support provided to the victims of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

While "IDP" and "Reintegration" operations in south-west Asia (including SBs) are well funded, "Refugee" operations in the rest of Asia, particularly in south-east Asia and south Asia continue to rely on unearmarked funding to sustain priority activities.
