

**Progress Report on Resettlement  
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*Agenda Item 3c)*

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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take a few minutes to draw your attention to recent trends related to the development of UNHCR's resettlement activities since the last progress report was provided to you in 2006. I will limit my intervention to a few points, as I do not wish to repeat in detail the information provided in Conference Room Paper (EC/59/SC/CRP.11) of 2 June 2008. This highlights some of the progress made in enhancing resettlement activities over the last two years. Positive and measurable indicators of this progress include:

- a significant increase in the number of resettlement submissions,
- an increased number of refugees who have left for resettlement countries,
- an increased number of women and girls at risk who have been resettled,
- an increased number of countries participating in global resettlement activities.

Another positive result has been the signing of a **tripartite agreement with Romania and the International Organization for Migration in May 2008** to facilitate the temporary and emergency evacuation of refugees, which will help UNHCR to meet its global strategic objective to improve protection against *refoulement*. A similar agreement has been finalized with the Philippines and is awaiting signature. Both the Philippines and Romania should be thanked for this contribution to global protection efforts. Such agreements are for us a concrete illustration of the commitment of these countries to provide temporary "protection space" for refugees at risk. We would like to use this opportunity to thank all resettlement countries which have supported the development of this initiative. UNHCR hopes that it will be able to rely on the financial support of its donors and Excom members (not just resettlement countries) to cover the costs associated with the management of this project, as some of the costs could not be accommodated in UNHCR's Annual Programme. We will be working with resettlement States in the coming weeks to encourage them to establish some sort of "un-earmarked" standby resettlement offers for refugees evacuated to Romania and to the Philippines.

The positive results, I have highlighted, would not have been possible without your support and active engagement for which we would like to thank you.

These developments also bring complex challenges and opportunities which need to be examined through enhanced partnership and dialogue with States and NGOs.

**The first challenge** that we are facing relates to **your and our collective capacity to address global needs for resettlement**. Considerable methodological efforts have been made this year by UNHCR field managers to better integrate resettlement into their protection and durable solutions strategies. As a result, the number of refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement has increased to reach 560.000 people. This number does not mean that these needs are necessarily new, or that these refugees will have to be resettled in this year or next. Given the current referral capacity of UNHCR (approximately 100,000 refugees annually) and the current in-take capacity of Resettlement States (approximately 70.000 annually), many of the needs will remain unmet in the short term. This number of refugees in need of resettlement, however, illustrates a better understanding by UNHCR field staff of the various potential roles of resettlement. 560,000 refugees in need of resettlement may seem to some of you an unrealistically high number. Yet it represents less than 5% of the global refugee population.

Given refugees' needs for resettlement and UNHCR's increased and more predictable referral capacity, UNHCR is pursuing **three parallel efforts** to bridge the gap. It is:

- encouraging more countries to establish resettlement programmes (or to consider ad hoc resettlement referrals from UNHCR);
- requesting traditional resettlement countries to increase their existing (annual or multi-year) resettlement programmes; and
- prioritizing referrals focusing on protection needs, protracted situations and other situations where resettlement can be used most strategically.

I would like to spend a few minutes on these three initiatives:

During the last two years, thirteen new countries have indicated their readiness to receive resettlement referrals from UNHCR. Five of these countries have established resettlement programmes. UNHCR continues exploring partnerships with other countries. In this respect, I would like to thank NGOs which are assisting us in these advocacy efforts. This development, which is consistent with UNHCR's global strategic objective No. 3 and Goal No. 5 of the *Agenda for Protection*, will ultimately expand resettlement opportunities for refugees, even though the number of new places available will remain initially below the estimated needs.

With the support of the European Commission, UNHCR has been facilitating the development of a number of flexible and practical twinning arrangements between resettlement countries and potential resettlement countries in Europe. This form of practical cooperation and learning will hopefully help to "de-mystify" what is resettlement. It will also assist States in developing adequate reception and integration programmes. It is hoped that the current efforts of the European Commission aimed at

establishing a common European Union resettlement scheme will be successful. European countries so far account for less than 5% of global resettlement efforts. During a meeting that you recently convened, Mr Chairman, a Dutch Former Development Minister, Mr Pronk, qualified the number of refugees being resettled in Europe as being “alarmingly low”. I cannot indeed think of any other area of humanitarian activity where Europe’s contribution is below 5%. UNHCR would therefore like to call on the forthcoming EU presidencies of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden to make serious promotional efforts in this respect.

Beyond Europe, some countries in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America may also hopefully join the community of resettlement States either by starting resettlement programmes or by funding the development of such programmes.

Traditional resettlement countries have not so far announced their intention to substantially increase their annual resettlement programme in 2009. The existence of some in-country “resettlement” programmes is having the direct effect of reducing the number of places available for the resettlement of refugees. UNHCR would like to encourage traditional resettlement countries to increase the size of their programme to address current needs. The Office does not wish to turn resettlement into a labour migration programme, but it has to consider the best interests of refugees. UNHCR would like to explore whether and how States would be prepared on a pilot basis, in addition to their programme resettlement programmes, to consider in a creative manner opening or incorporating acceptance of refugees in their migration programmes.

The need for UNHCR to further prioritize its referrals in 2009 will form an important part of the debate with resettlement countries at the October meeting of the Working Group on Resettlement.

**The second challenge** that we are collectively facing is to ensure that the in-take of resettlement countries **recognizes and takes into consideration the geographical and individual diversity of the needs** for resettlement on all continents. Over the last two years, the geographical imbalance in terms of resettlement submissions and departures is presenting a number of challenges. Resettlement from Asia constituted in 2007, 52% of the submissions made by UNHCR. Various factors described in the Conference Room Paper contribute to this phenomenon. The group resettlement methodology is not as such to be blamed as a tool. UNHCR and its partners should, however, ensure that resettlement activities from Asia should not be at the detriment of equally deserving refugee populations in other regions, in particular in Africa which only accounted for 18% of resettlement departures in 2007. The need to restore more balance in terms of geographical diversity when considering global needs may require some rethinking between resettlement partners and UNHCR on prioritization and quota management.

Resettlement countries often determine to some extent the use and allocation of their resettlement capacity based on domestic considerations and external constraints. As a result, the refugees who are selected for resettlement, the size of targets and programmes, and/or the priority accorded to certain populations may be sometimes more

**influenced by domestic interests** than by international protection needs. Indeed, governmental responses to particular populations are greatly influenced by programme management considerations such as access to refugees (including security, logistic and budget considerations) and population profiles that affect programme delivery (e.g. “high risk” populations in terms of inadmissibility, lengthy and enhanced security checks or other complexities). This can inhibit countries’ ability and willingness to consider positively even refugees whom they acknowledge have specific and priority needs for resettlement. This may lead a number of resettlement countries preferring the same refugee population (e.g. an accessible and “low risk” population), which creates gaps in meeting global resettlement needs and priorities.

This approach also contributes to the development of a growing population of refugees whom the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection described last year at the Executive Committee as “the untouchables” (i.e. refugees in need of resettlement who are not considered because of their age, family size, ethnicity, political convictions, socio-economic status or perceived integration potential).. Since the International Conference on Iraq in April 2007, UNHCR has, for instance, repeatedly drawn the attention of all States to the need to resettle Palestinian refugees fleeing Iraq. In spite of these efforts, only four countries have considered this priority protection group. We could unfortunately multiply this example with other groups of “forgotten” refugees in desperate need of resettlement.

Resettlement programmes should also better recognize the **diversity of refugees’ individual protection needs**. The use of selection criteria which are limited to a specific religious or ethnic group when other refugees from the same country of origin are equally in need of resettlement plays against the strategic use of resettlement. The same remark applies to countries using excessively the notion of refugees’ integration potential. It gives the immediate impression to host countries that there are two categories of refugees: the “wanted” and the “unwanted”. This approach could be seen as discriminatory and it would lead to situations of tensions between refugees and UNHCR offices and with the host countries.

**A third challenge** relates to **the “mechanics” of resettlement** and in particular resettlement departures. The average processing time of the majority of resettlement countries remains far too long and does not appear to be decreasing. UNHCR does not object to the need to undertake adequate health and security checks prior to authorizing departures of resettled refugees. However, the current level of unpredictability in processing times for each refugee creates unnecessary tensions and frustrations. Long waiting periods impact negatively on the psychological well-being of refugees. This also means that the impact of resettlement is less visible which reduces its strategic value for UNHCR with some host countries.

UNHCR has made progress in preparing and referring cases of **women and girls at risk** in line with the guidance received from the Executive Committee in its Conclusion No. 105 (2006). In this respect, UNHCR calls on resettlement States and other partners to implement in practice the last part of Conclusion No. 105 which called for the

establishment of “*measures to enable the speedier departure of refugee women at risk and their dependants*”. So far such measures have not been put in place by the majority of resettlement countries, women and girls at risk have to wait like other refugees for long periods of time before departing, thus placing them at considerable further risk. In addition, the practice of some resettlement countries of not accepting young adult unmarried daughters of refugees accepted for resettlement is directly contributing to their vulnerability to protection risks.

UNHCR is also concerned by the **practice of some “host countries”** which delay or simply block the departure for some refugees accepted by resettlement countries. These practices include the prolonged detention of refugees (often *incommunicado*) and the requirement that UNHCR or resettlement States pay heavy fines because of the illegal stay of refugees who had no effective and safe way to regularize their stay. The effective implementation of resettlement activities requires the full cooperation of host countries in terms of unhindered access to refugees, adequate processing facilities and smooth exit procedures.

**A fourth challenge** may be seen in our collective capacity to use resettlement in an even **more strategic manner**, i.e. in a way that can create protection “dividends” or “benefits” for other refugees who are not resettled. The manifestation of these benefits may take different forms in host countries. Sometimes the impact is only visible over a number of years. In some situations, the impact is almost simultaneous and translates, for instance, into the grant of temporary residence permits to other refugees or allows UNHCR to visit refugees in detention. UNHCR always tries to enlarge “asylum space” and the “quality of asylum” through the use of resettlement. In some protracted situations, the use of resettlement can be decisive in unblocking other durable solutions or in broadening opportunities for self-reliance activities.

If resettlement is always best used strategically, however, we should keep in mind that there are unfortunately daily situations, where resettlement cannot be used strategically, but rather as a unique and precious protection tool that saves lives and protects refugees against *refoulement* or other threats to their physical safety. In this respect, UNHCR would like to encourage resettlement countries to provide additional opportunities in terms of dossier referrals in particular for emergency and medical cases.

I would like to conclude with a few words **on the fifth challenge** confronting us which relates to **improving organizational performance**. In 2007, UNHCR introduced a number of practical tools which should help field offices improve their output both qualitatively and quantitatively and will continue this process in 2008-2009. These tools include a baseline standard operating procedure (SOP) for resettlement activities, anti-fraud measures, a heightened risk identification tool, performance indicators for resettlement staff, “flash alerts” on specific groups, and more precise programming instructions to assess resettlement needs and processing capacity. Improved operational cooperation with IOM and renewed efforts with NGOs have also contributed to better resettlement delivery.

Some of the progress is still constrained by technical limitations of UNHCR registration system (*ProGres*). No funding is unfortunately available to develop the system in order to address current needs, in particular in relation to “field-to field” connectivity and improved in-take of biometric features.

I would also like to stress that the above mentioned improved tools which impact on the volume of our referrals would not have been achieved without the **additional earmarked funding** provided by very few resettlement countries among which I would particularly like to thank the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Norway and Australia. This heavy dependency on additional earmarked funding is indeed problematic in many respects. But, as UNHCR is facing budgetary cuts, which also affect resettlement activities, additional earmarked contributions will remain needed in 2009-2010 to respond flexibly to refugees’ needs at the field level.

Mr Chairman, I would finally like to take this opportunity to thank Canada and particularly, Mr David Manicom from the Permanent Mission of Canada who has served as Chairperson of the Resettlement Working Group over the last 12 months. His dedication, commitment and advocacy efforts, in particular with a number of European countries to start or to resume resettlement activities, have been particularly appreciated. We wish him success in his new assignment.

I am confident that UNHCR will be able to count on your continuous support to make this protection tool, this durable solution and this instrument of international solidarity accessible to a larger number of refugees, particularly those coming from protracted refugee situations. Next week we will convene the 14th Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. A lot has been said and written on the responsibility to protect, but we would like to seize this opportunity to encourage States to think of resettlement as a practical form of sharing this responsibility to protect.

Thank you for your attention.

*This statement is available in UNHCR’s Refworld at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4864cf342.html>.*