



A sobering

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As 2016 draws to a close, the plight of those uprooted by conflict, violence and persecution is higher on the international agenda than perhaps ever before. Yet building and maintaining peace has become increasingly difficult, with more than 65 million people now displaced globally as refugees, or within their own countries.

The entangled conflicts in Iraq and Syria account for almost a quarter of this number, but major crises in South Sudan, Yemen and the Lake Chad region of Africa are also major drivers of forced displacement. Meanwhile, continued instability in countries such as

Internally displaced Iraqi women and children walk down a rocky path into Debaga camp, near Mosul in northern Iraq.



picture

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Somalia and Afghanistan means that large numbers of people remain in protracted displacement, with little hope of a definitive solution. The impact of refugee outflows is most acutely felt in the countries neighbouring the conflict zones, with nine out of ten refugees hosted in developing countries.

Displacement is also exacerbated by factors such as food insecurity, environmental degradation, climate change and scarcity of resources – with the result that people are being forced from their homes for a more complex range of reasons than at any point in history. At the same time, access to protection is all

too often compromised, with borders closed, entry restricted and the quality of asylum undermined.

Those who do reach safety are often left struggling on the margins of society, with few opportunities to establish meaningful and productive lives. Refugees face increasing pressures to return home, in a manner that may be less than voluntary and in which their ability to pursue a secure and productive future is far from assured. In certain regions, xenophobia and nationalism undermine the values of tolerance and solidarity on which the Refugee Convention and the long-standing tradition of asylum are founded.

Unable to return home because of conflict and persecution, some are moving onwards and—together with migrants—are exposed to heightened protection risks, including exploitation by traffickers and smugglers in life-threatening journeys across land and sea.

Acknowledging shared responsibilities and forging new responses

And yet, despite this challenging picture, 2016 has seen a remarkable upsurge in international attention to the refugee cause. And despite many challenges, the international refugee protection regime is still at the foundation of how states respond to refugee outflows, with most countries bordering conflict zones still keeping their borders open as they search for ways to reconcile their international obligations with domestic social, economic and security concerns. The majority of host countries—many of them, we should remember, amongst the poorest in the world—have remained resolute in extending protection to those seeking it, providing essential assistance and basic services and enabling them to pursue a path to greater stability.

Forced displacement has taken centre stage as one of today's defining global challenges. In September 2016 the United Nations Summit on Refugees and Migrants, and the Leader's Summit on Refugees hosted by U.S. President Obama, together gave voice to a critical recognition that international cooperation lies at the heart of the international protection regime, so placing the refugee issue firmly on the international agenda for the first time in decades.

UNHCR's strategic directions

Against this sobering backdrop—and yet one which also presents real possibilities for change—a number of key considerations and priorities have emerged that will shape UNHCR's strategic directions over the coming years.

First, UNHCR will continue to be a consistent and articulate voice for protection principles and standards and for the rights and dignity of refugees, IDPs and stateless people, and will embed these aims at the centre of its responses. Our engagement is driven by the fundamental objective of saving lives and protecting rights. In today's context this means offering practical support to countries striving to uphold their responsibilities amidst complex political and security challenges. It means forging responses to new protection challenges and drivers of displacement, such as in the Northern Triangle of Central America. It means direct operational engagement, consistently seeking regular contact with the people and communities we serve, and ensuring their full participation in decisions affecting their lives.

Second, we will enhance and deepen our pursuit of solutions, even though this may sometimes seem counterintuitive in the context of so many intractable conflicts. UNHCR has been mandated to seek out and leverage possible solutions that would enable refugees, IDPs and stateless people to acquire or reacquire full membership in society and to build productive and stable futures. This means orienting our response towards the pursuit of solutions from the very outset of a crisis, and mobilizing the political, security and development actors that have the capacity to address the drivers of displacement. In places such as Myanmar and Colombia, real prospects for political solutions have emerged, which in turn could pave the way to resolving the long-term displacement in and from those countries. In situations in which a definitive resolution of conflict is not yet in sight and the conditions are not yet in place for organized return, host countries must receive intensified support and those who opt to return voluntarily on their own must be provided with reintegration assistance.

The pursuit of solutions also encompasses our commitment to end statelessness. With an estimated 10 million people currently without a nationality, progress is—and has proven to be—



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UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi talks to an Afghan boy at a shelter for unaccompanied minors in Athens, Greece.

possible, with a strong collective commitment and the right investments.

A third strategic direction is to reinforce and expand UNHCR's capacity and expertise in emergency preparedness and response. Although this has always been a defining priority of our work, the increasing number of large-scale new and recurring crises means that we must redouble our efforts in this area. In the last quarter of 2016, more than 2,000 people were fleeing South Sudan every day, and inter-agency preparations were intensifying—despite mounting concerns over inadequate financial resources—in anticipation of the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from Mosul in Iraq. Emergencies such as these represent the point at which protection risks are most acute, and we will continue to invest in ensuring our ability to respond.

Fourth, we are firmly committed to securing the engagement of development actors

in addressing forced displacement and statelessness. There is a growing consensus that development investments must play a central role in addressing displacement and laying the groundwork for solutions. The principle of universality, embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provides the basis upon which refugees, the internally displaced and stateless people should be included in development planning.

To achieve this, we have been progressively scaling up our partnership with the World Bank and other key development actors, such as the ILO and OECD. New instruments and groundbreaking approaches are helping ensure that the displaced and stateless people are included in national systems and services and that they are connected with economic opportunities that also benefit host communities. With fewer than half of all school-age refugees in school, expanding access to education through inclusion in national systems, and avoiding parallel ones

where possible, is another key priority that can only be achieved through sustained international investment.

Finally, UNHCR will aim to work more systematically across the entire spectrum of displacement and, in particular, forge a more decisive and predictable engagement with internally displaced people in collaboration with OCHA and other partners, and in line with established coordination mechanisms. We will pursue situational approaches that ensure that our engagement with refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless people is coherent and mutually reinforcing.

These five strategic directions will be underpinned by a reinvigorated commitment to partnerships and a diverse and coherent multilateral system, shaped by the important outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit. Partnerships with governments—which bear the primary responsibility for protection and solutions—are especially important, as are our partnerships with national and international NGOs. Yet there is a compelling need to expand partnerships and alliances to encompass a broader range of actors and individuals than in the past. Private sector partners, in particular, are playing an increasingly prominent role in shaping public opinion and driving change, and in providing the added resources, technical expertise, creativity and innovation to address displacement.

The New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants provides a powerful platform for change in the way the international community engages in refugee crises. It reaffirms the importance of the international refugee protection regime, including the protection principles and standards articulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention and associated instruments, but also international

customary law and many cultural and religious traditions that have afforded protection to refugees over the years. It clearly recognizes that today's refugee crises cannot be managed by any one State alone, and calls for a predictable and collaborative response based on international solidarity.

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, called for in the Declaration, provides a blueprint for translating the principle of responsibility-sharing into action, in support of refugees and host communities. It is based on the fundamental principle that refugees are a matter of international concern and emphasizes the need to engage a full range of instruments and actors in the political, security, humanitarian and development spheres. A key priority for UNHCR in 2017 and 2018 will be to work together with partners to apply the framework operationally and—drawing from the resulting experience—to develop a global compact for refugees to be adopted in 2018, as envisaged in the Declaration. Many elements of the framework can already be discerned in some operations and will be amplified and accelerated as appropriate.

To achieve these goals, we will work closely with States, UN partners and other international organizations, including the ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, NGOs and civil society, academia and the business community, as well as refugees themselves.

The next two years will undoubtedly continue to bring new and complex challenges with regard to forced displacement and statelessness. However, this is also a moment of real opportunity. As such, it must be grasped and translated into concrete action – action that leads to demonstrable improvements in the lives of those to whom we are mandated to protect and assist. With the strategic directions guiding its response, UNHCR will be well placed to play a key role in mobilizing and shaping a stronger, more predictable and systematic international response to displacement crises globally. ■



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UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie meets with a young boy who is being treated at the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Amman, Jordan.

With 16 years of service to UNHCR, Special Envoy Angelina Jolie Pitt continues to be a staunch advocate for refugees and for the need to find solutions to their plight. She supports the High Commissioner in appealing to governments to find diplomatic solutions to crises around the world and to consider what more can be done to provide safety to those fleeing persecution and war. She has recently focused her efforts on the Syria situation,

visiting Syrian refugees in Greece, Jordan and Lebanon in 2016 and urging world governments to show leadership in addressing the crisis. On World Refugee Day, following a meeting with the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, the Special Envoy issued an urgent call for governments to address conflict and insecurity, and to do more for the displaced worldwide. ■

“If I ask people for anything on this day, it is to take a moment and to truly grasp what a refugee crisis of today’s magnitude means for peace and security of the world. I ask people to understand that with 65 million people displaced by conflict, we are facing a world of wars we cannot ignore or turn our backs on. To do that would be naive, irresponsible, and dangerous.”

“We face a very clear choice: to continue as we are and see displacement and insecurity grow, or to come together with other nations and find a new approach, one that does not focus solely on aid and resettlement but on solution, stability, and returns.”