

REPORT ON THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S FIVE COMMITMENTS  
TO REFUGEE WOMEN

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In December 2001, the High Commissioner announced his intention to pursue Five Commitments to Refugee Women to advance their rights and to implement concrete measures to improve their protection.<sup>1</sup> These commitments were in response to issues raised by refugee women in consultations held at local, regional and headquarters levels in 2001. The issues included registration, documentation, food distribution, health, education, physical safety and security, participation in peace building and decision making, and opportunities for skills development and income generation.

2. In June 2004, UNHCR provided the Standing Committee with a compilation of country updates on the implementation of the Five Commitments for the year 2003.<sup>2</sup> The current report focuses on the implementation status of the Five Commitments in UNHCR operations at the end of 2004. It presents the first analysis of the implementation of the Five Commitments to Refugee Women using standards and indicators reports (SIRs) based on the Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations published by UNHCR in February 2004.

3. "Standards and Indicators" are a tool designed to support results-based management in UNHCR. The standards prescribed are used as a global yardstick to measure operational progress and identify major gaps using the data reported against the indicator. Where data is available, progress is assessed based on a comparison of the indicators reported by UNHCR operations for 2003 and 2004. The Camp Indicator reports (CIRs) were received in 2004 for the year 2003. In 2003, CIRs were requested from all camps with a population above 5000, and for 2004 the reporting was changed to include all camps with a population above 2500. Standards and indicators reports (SIRs) for 2004 were submitted in March 2005. Although the information presented demonstrates modest results, this is an important step towards ensuring objective reporting on progress in implementing the Five Commitments. In 2004 training on the use of standards and indicators and data collection was extended to partners as well as UNHCR staff.

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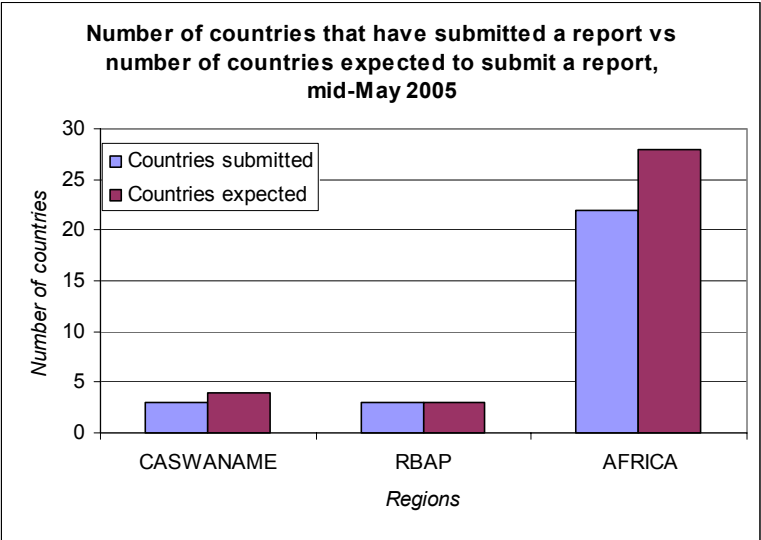
<sup>1</sup> Report on the Dialogue with Refugee Women, Geneva, 20-22 June 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women, UNHCR, Geneva (reprinted October 2004).

II. CRITERIA USED FOR ANALYSIS

4. The indicator data that has been analysed and presented in this paper focuses mainly on refugee camps in Asia, Africa and CASWANAME, and should be considered as provisional for two reasons. Firstly, this paper is limited to data analysis of the 95 camps which submitted their indicator reports by mid-May 2005. A more accurate overview on global trends in camp settings will be available when information is obtained from the remaining camps still due to report (approximately 40).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, data verification is still in progress. However, the information analysed is considered to be sufficiently reliable to enable identification of some trends in progress with implementation of the Five Commitments to Refugee Women. It should be noted that although 95 SIRs were received, not all provided data on each indicator.

5. SIRs were also requested from non-camp settings for 2004 on a pilot basis, and these are still under review. However, the Americas and Europe have made serious efforts to implement the Five Commitments in non-camp settings especially in the areas of women’s participation in leadership and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response activities. Europe has fully implemented the commitment on individual registration and documentation for all refugee men and women. In the Americas, participation of refugee and displaced women in associations has increased significantly, with a high number of women now holding leadership positions.



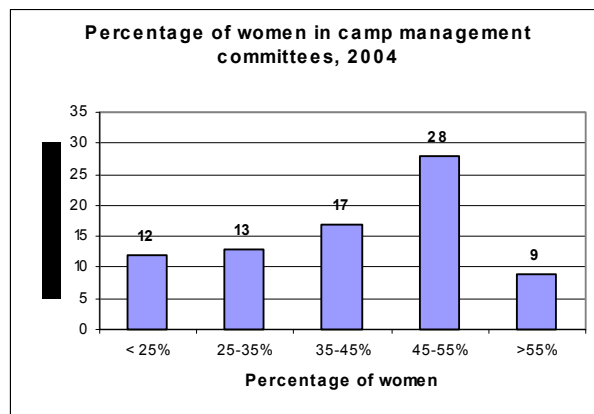
<sup>3</sup> Chad, Pakistan, Liberia and Sierra Leone are yet to report. Operational constraints are being addressed and the information is being verified.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION STATUS REVIEW

Commitment no. 1: *All UNHCR offices will encourage the active participation of women in all management and leadership committees of refugees in urban, rural and camp settings, including return areas.*

6. The aim of this commitment is to ensure that protection concerns and views of refugee

women are heard and that they participate equally with men in decision-making processes within management structures. The proportion of women in camp management committees provides an indication of their representation.<sup>4</sup> In 2004, 79 refugee camps reported on the proportion of women representation in management committees. In 28 of these camps (36 per cent), the representation of women in the committees ranged between 45 and 55 per cent.<sup>5</sup> Less than half of these camps reported that the management committee included fewer than 45 per cent of women refugees. The 12 refugee camps with the lowest proportion of women in management committees were located in the Republic of the Congo (2), the Islamic Republic of Iran (2), Ethiopia (4), Thailand (3) and Guinea (1).



7. UNHCR's goal of ensuring gender parity in camp leadership positions has not yet been achieved in most refugee camps, though some progress has been made since 2003. In the 49 refugee camps with comparable data for the years 2003 and 2004, the proportion of women among the committee members increased on average from 42 per cent in 2003 to 46 per cent in 2004. About 15 camps reported a decrease in female representation in camp management committees while the remainder reported an increase.

8. However, even when the target of 50 per cent is reached, many offices report that the decision-making processes are often controlled by men. The 10 countries with the lowest participation levels will be targeted for further analysis, technical support and follow-up. Information will be disseminated and sessions will be organized on the use of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted on 31 October 2000, for refugee women and men to promote their right to participate in peace-building processes. This resolution stipulates the special measures that are to be implemented to address women's protection and assistance needs and calls for increased participation by women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes.

<sup>4</sup> Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations, UNHCR, Geneva, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Although the Practical Guide gives a standard of 50 per cent, a range of 45 to 55 per cent has been applied in this report to take into consideration standard error for the 50 per cent. This will ensure that small committees which almost achieve gender parity are also recognized.

9. Additional activities will be initiated with refugee male leadership to further sensitize them on emerging gender role changes and the advantages of working in partnership with women. Currently, an NGO partner, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, is undertaking research and developing resource materials on the concept of "masculinities" to support this objective. A draft resource packet on "Masculinities" describes the concept as conveying "the notion that there are many socially constructed definitions for being a man and that these can change over time and from place to place. The term relates to perceived notions and ideals about how men should or are expected to behave in a given setting."

*Commitment no. 2: UNHCR commits to the individual registration of all refugee men and women and to provide them with relevant documentation ensuring their individual security, freedom of movement and access to essential services.*<sup>6</sup>

10. Most of the reports received did not provide data disaggregated by sex and age and it is therefore difficult to analyse the situation. The implementation of Project Profile is expected to resolve this problem and will be the main source of such data in the future. Individual registration of refugee men and women is essential for ensuring equal access to protection, assistance and durable solutions. Failure to register refugee women individually results frequently in their dependence on male household representatives for access to food and other essential services, which in turn leads to increased protection problems for women and other family members.

11. Of equal importance to individual registration is the issuance of identity and entitlement documentation. Lack of individual identity documentation for refugee women and men may severely hamper their freedom of movement. Moreover, where men are provided with identity documentation but women are not, women may be unable to decide independently when or if to travel. Without identity documentation, women may also be unable to move about and perform basic daily activities, such as going to the market, particularly if living in urban areas.

12. The Registration Handbook produced by Project Profile serves as the Office's primary reference for standards relating to registration and documentation, and has been distributed to UNHCR operations and partners worldwide. The Handbook stresses that identity documents and entitlement documents (e.g. ration cards) must be issued as separate documents. The names of all adult women as well as men should appear on household entitlement documents. Where needed, entitlement documents should be issued individually instead of on a household basis.

13. Since July 2004, Project Profile has conducted training on registration in thirty separate country operations, as well as in two regional workshops (one for southern Africa, the other for the CASWANAME region). By the end of 2005, fifty individual country operations will have been covered. In each of these operations, Project Profile installs "ProGres", the Office's new registration database application, which is compliant with the standards in the Registration Handbook. ProGres requires that each person be registered on an individual basis.

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<sup>6</sup> This commitment was reinforced by the Conclusion on Registration of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers adopted by the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Executive Committee (2001).

14. With a substantial number of countries being targeted for implementation of the ProGres registration software in 2005 and 2006, it is expected that the proportion of women refugees being individually registered and provided with individual documentation will increase significantly in the next couple of years. In addition to its many other functions, ProGres is able to generate identity and entitlement documentation with digital photographs. Individual identity documents in various formats are being produced by an increasing number of country operations, including Liberia, Malaysia, Chad, Malawi, Botswana and Mozambique.

*Commitment no 3: Recognizing that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be a severe impediment to the advancement of women and the enjoyment of their rights, UNHCR commits to developing integrated country-level strategies to address it.*

15. Since 2003, UNHCR has distributed the SGBV guidelines to the field and organized country-level and regional training programmes for UNHCR and implementing partner staff to undertake SGBV prevention and response activities. Despite increased awareness on SGBV prevention and response mechanisms among refugee men and women, the survivors often remain reluctant to report SGBV incidents. The data presented in this document should be considered as provisional due to this challenge of under-reporting of SGBV incidences. It should be noted that low reporting is not necessarily an indication of a decrease in SGBV incidents.

16. In 2004, 62 camps reported data on SGBV cases. In total, these camps reported 4,600 adult cases of SGBV, 3,790 of which involved women (82 per cent). Of the reports that were received from camps, 55 camps stated that all the SGBV survivors reporting to UNHCR or its implementing partners received support. Forms of support include, but are not limited to, psychosocial or other counselling, medical treatment, legal support, safe accommodation or other security and safety response and skills training. Three of the camps stated that between 50 and 100 per cent had been supported, while less than 50 per cent had been followed up in four of the camps. In total, 86 per cent of the women who were survivors of SGBV in the 62 refugee camps received support during 2004.

17. In 2004, 1218 SGBV cases of under 18 years were reported in the 62 camps of which 92 per cent concerned girls and the remaining involved boys. While all the boys received follow-up support, only 87 per cent of the girls received support. Field offices report that many parents of the girl survivors do not approach the health, counselling or legal centres due to fear that the family and girl will be ostracized by their community.

18. Incidents of harassment and rape continue to be highest when women and girls collect firewood and water. This issue is being further explored to identify strategies for addressing these problems through active involvement of refugee communities, civil society and host governments.

19. In addition to supporting the survivors of SGBV, UNHCR actively seeks to promote attitudinal changes among refugee men and women of all age groups through education and awareness-building activities on the rights of refugee women and girls. In 2004, 58 refugee camps reported that over 82,000 refugees had participated in SGBV-awareness raising and about half (46 per cent) comprised male participants. The numbers of camps where 10 per cent or more

of the refugee population participated in SGBV-prevention activities doubled from 2003 to 2004 due to increased awareness-raising activities; it is recognized, however, that UNHCR's efforts still require improvement.

20. Good field practices on SGBV prevention and response initiatives include Uganda, where UNHCR is working with the Government and other partners on a national plan for SGBV prevention and response. In a number of other countries UNHCR negotiates with government partners to include female police officers in camp patrols. Some field operations, notably in Guinea, continue to implement activities with men by forming men's groups to fight violence against women and through conducting sessions with refugee men on the gender roles of men and women, including the analysis of decision-making processes. In South Africa, UNHCR has supported partners to undertake research with adolescent girls and boys on SGBV issues as part of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children. In Darfur, UNHCR is working in partnership with a university to study the psychosocial problems that are prevalent and to strengthen the capacities of UNHCR and partners' staff to address psychosocial trauma.

21. UNHCR and implementing partner staff in the field operations will continue to receive specific training to upgrade their skills to promote SGBV prevention awareness and provide efficient emergency and multi-sectoral support to survivors. All country-level SGBV prevention and response training for UNHCR and partner staff will be followed up with each office establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with partners, UN sister agencies, refugee and host communities.

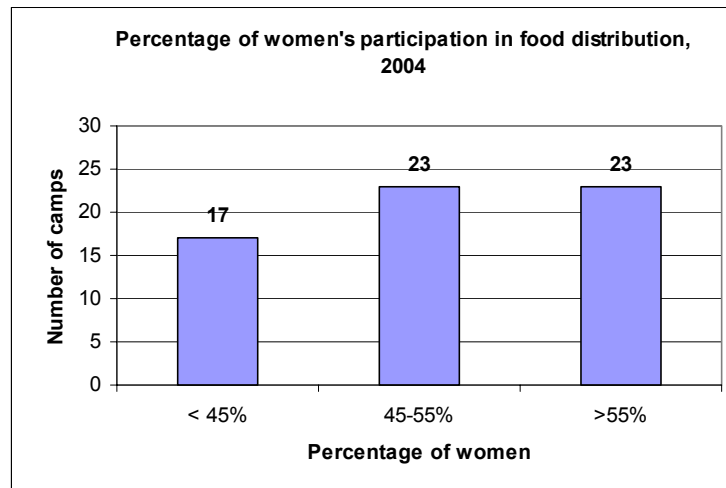
22. In order to improve systematic reporting and monitoring, a country-level database to record basic information including follow-up of individual SGBV cases is being designed in collaboration with Project Profile and will be field tested in 2006.

*Commitment no. 4: UNHCR will ensure that refugee women participate directly and indirectly in the management and distribution of food and non-food items.*

23. In cooperation with the World Food Programme and other partners, UNHCR has made continued efforts to ensure that refugee women participate directly and indirectly in the management and distribution of food and non-food items. Operations have taken various affirmative actions such as the nomination of female food monitors, the inclusion of women's names on food ration cards, the production and dissemination of leaflets about food ration entitlements and the organization of regular meetings with refugee women to assess the implications of food distribution systems and jointly seek solutions to problems.

24. The indicator for this commitment was not introduced in 2003 and therefore the data is limited to the year 2004. Regarding the involvement of male and female refugees in food distribution, 63 camps reported that a total of almost 4,000 persons (2254 females and 1746 males) were involved. The majority of the refugee camps meet the 50 per cent standard of involving refugee women in food distribution. The involvement ranges from participating in decision making regarding food distribution, to verifying the ration cards, scooping food grains and monitoring food rations collections.

25. In 24 of the 63 camps (38 per cent), the proportion of women participating in food distribution ranged between 45 and 55 per cent. In 22 camps more than 55 per cent are female food distributors, while in 17 camps less than 45 per cent of the distributors are women. Of the 17 camps, 11 reported that less than 40 per cent of the women are involved in food distribution. These camps are located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), the Islamic Republic of Iran (2), Yemen (1), Djibouti (2), Sudan (1), Uganda (1), Bangladesh (2) and Nepal (1).



26. In 2004, UNHCR and WFP jointly undertook studies of women's participation in food distribution in Sierra Leone and Kenya. Major improvements were noted in women's participation in decisions regarding food distribution. It was evident that there was an increase in the number of women who served as scoopers, ration card verifiers, etc. In the light of these findings, the standards and indicators data and other qualitative field reports, UNHCR will embark on activities with WFP and partners by targeting those camps with less than 50 per cent participation of women in food distribution. The activities will be aimed at mobilizing women to participate meaningfully in food distribution committees by providing them with practical training in leadership and food distribution monitoring skills.

*Commitment no. 5: The provision of sanitary materials to all women and girls of concern will become standard practice in all UNHCR assistance programmes.*

27. Provision of sanitary materials is viewed as crucial to the health and dignity of women and girls. All country operations are to distribute sanitary materials for women and girls in the age group 13-49 years.<sup>7</sup> In situations where the refugee community is economically self-reliant,

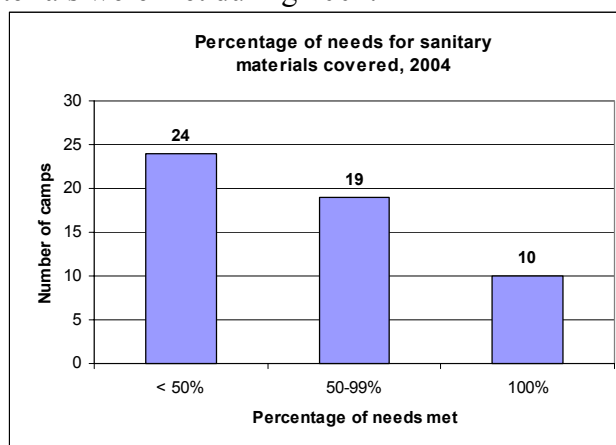
<sup>7</sup> According to the Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations, the standard kit comprises 4 square metres of absorbent cotton material, 6 underpants and 3kgs of soap per person, per year.

UNHCR does not undertake the distribution of sanitary kits. Nearly all camp refugees included in this report receive assistance from the international community, either through UNHCR or from operational partners. However, in certain cases where refugees are considered economically self-sufficient, UNHCR may target groups with specific needs for assistance.

28. Fifty-three camps reported on sanitary kit distribution. Of some 250,000 refugee women in the 13-49 years age group who should have received sanitary kits, 80 per cent benefited in varying degrees.

29. In almost half of the camps (24) for which information was available, less than 50 per cent of the needs for sanitary materials were met during 2004.

These camps were located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2), the United Republic of Tanzania (7), the Islamic Republic of Iran (1), Ethiopia (1), Kenya (4), Sudan (2), Thailand (6) and Guinea (1). Nineteen camps reported that 50 to 99 per cent of the needs for sanitary materials were covered during 2004. The 10 refugee camps (19 per cent) reporting in 2004 on compliance of distribution of sanitary materials with established standards were located in the Central African Republic (1), Bangladesh (2), Zambia (4), Côte d'Ivoire (1), Ghana (1) and Nigeria (1). Funding shortages are a major factor in country operations not complying with UNHCR standards.



30. Field operations report that in an environment of limited resources where life-saving needs must be met, operations are forced to prioritize and are unable to distribute 100 per cent of the needs for sanitary kits. They report that lack of sanitary materials for school girls over 13 years has caused them to drop out of schools, affecting, inter alia, their possibility to complete primary education, register for vocational skills, and participate in community affairs and assume positions of leadership in the future.

31. UNHCR continues to work with women's committees to assess sanitary material needs, organize distribution, monitor and measure results. The quality of the sanitary materials is not always optimal, although consultation with refugee women has helped improve the sanitary kits in some countries, including Thailand.

32. Country operations will be encouraged to dialogue with refugee women and local women's associations within the camps to identify culturally sensitive and cost-efficient methods to fulfil this commitment. For example, refugee women in some eastern and southern African countries have suggested that they be given "Kitange" (two pieces of cloth used as a wrap around) so that they can recycle their old Kitanges for sanitary material. Other avenues will be explored, including a possible increase of the budget for sanitary material distribution through private fund-raising.



#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

33. In 2004, UNHCR presented narrative data for each country operation on the Five Commitments to refugee women. The data presented here is purely quantitative; however, despite its limitations it clearly highlights where UNHCR stands today in relation to the commitments and provides a good basis for designing future actions.

34. These actions will include the fine-tuning of the standards and indicators formulated for the Five Commitments based on the experience gained in analysing them for this report; the organizing of focus group discussions with refugee men, women and boys and girls to evaluate progress made and suggest ways forward; and the holding of in-house discussions on the strategic needs of women and the need for affirmative action to promote their right to participate in decision making, leadership, peace processes and the design of durable solutions. It is also envisaged that the Five Commitments will be better incorporated into operations and programme planning through the promotion of participatory assessments with women, girls, boys and men as part of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy in 2005 and 2006.

35. The use of standards and indicators to analyse the implementation status of the Five Commitments has demonstrated their usefulness as a management tool for engaging with field operations, as well as a means for enhancing transparent reporting and accountability.