

High Commissioner's Forum
(20 May 2005)

Closing statement by Mr. Kamel Morjane,
Assistant High Commissioner

Targeting Development Assistance

We have heard quite a number of expressions of support and appreciation for the document presented on good practice on targeting development assistance for durable solutions to forced displacement. As announced earlier, there will be another opportunity to discuss the document relating to the Millennium Development Goals in the margins of the June Standing Committee.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to our discussions today, in particular those States that have shared their positive experience in the targeting of development assistance. I also want to express my thanks to those States that have shouldered much of the responsibility for hosting and protecting refugees.

We have heard the concerns of some delegations that development assistance oriented to refugee-affected areas may diminish overall humanitarian support to refugees and, in addition, that refugees may be encouraged to remain in exile. On this last point, allow me to reiterate my conviction, which I shared with you at the opening of this meeting, that engendering self-reliance is a useful preparation for any of the durable solutions.

Most of you have recognized that in many circumstances uprooted populations can indeed be agents of development. While we were cautioned that UNHCR is not a development agency, I want to reiterate here very clearly what I said at the opening of this meeting: UNHCR is not and does not wish to become in any way a development agency or dilute its protection mandate. It is precisely this mandate that leads us to embrace the targeting of development assistance as an effective tool of responsibility and burden-sharing.

It is our experience and that of many of you here today that, beyond the initial emergency phase, working with development agencies and within the framework of national and regional development plans is the best way to ensure that assistance to refugees also fosters the economic and social development of hosting communities and, ultimately, those of return. In this regard, many of you stressed the need for additionality of resources. This has been key to the positive experiences, particularly in Uganda and Zambia.

In addition, as recognized by the World Bank representative this morning, UNHCR's presence on the ground in some of the most difficult and impoverished locations provides us with detailed knowledge of displaced populations and their host communities. This means that UNHCR can and indeed must make a substantial contribution to the work of State authorities and UN Country Teams on national and regional development frameworks. This is, in fact, UNHCR's catalytic role to which many have referred.

As I responded briefly to the statement of the African Group, we take note of the suggestion to create a Working Group of States to take forward these discussions and to analyze good practices in a transparent manner. We will, as I said, consult further on this proposal. By the same token, I wish to remind delegations that this issue has been the subject of recurrent

debate over the past decades. I share a certain amount of frustration that we continue to talk about principles and aspirations. As noted by the Afghan Deputy Minister this morning, there remains a lot to be done to bridge the now infamous gap between humanitarian assistance and development. I think this is why Denmark and Japan have both reaffirmed their interest in focusing on concrete projects and taking a bottom-up approach to this issue.

As Norway eloquently advised this afternoon, we need to remain flexible in our approaches to realizing durable solutions for refugees and other displaced populations.

Irregular secondary movements and the strategic use of resettlement

We have heard both of the need to clarify State roles and responsibilities in regard to irregular secondary movements, and the challenges this involves. What the Convention Plus Core Group has afforded is an opportunity to address these challenges in an open and transparent manner, which, as South Africa emphasized, benefits from the perspectives and contributions of a wider number of stakeholders.

The importance of promoting international responsibility sharing within a framework of rights and responsibilities has also been stressed. While migration control mechanisms are a component of this discussion, it is not the only objective. As some of you noted today, we must address root causes of irregular secondary movements in order to reduce such movements. Control measures must be underpinned by strengthening protection capacities and must also involve protection-sensitive return and readmission policies. As the Netherlands observed, it will be a question of striking a balance in the draft framework under discussion. I would like to encourage the ISM Core Group to continue to work with determination in the same spirit of engagement and open manner that has characterized its work to date.

I welcome Thailand's call for flexibility in resettlement criteria. As Ms. Feller noted, a heavy focus on integration potential as a resettlement criterion diminishes the potential for more strategic and effective use of resettlement. At the same time we have heard encouraging developments in Latin America and the wider use of the group methodology has been welcomed here today.

The next steps

Regarding the future of Convention Plus, we must pursue the work that we have started and achieve as much as we can before the next meeting of the Forum. Convention Plus is gradually being mainstreamed into UNHCR's operations. Mainstreaming, however, does not mean that our efforts will sink into oblivion. The commitment must continue.

As to the Convention Plus Unit, we will not have a definitive answer on its future role until the next High Commissioner is in place. In the meantime we are working on a number of options that will be presented to the new High Commissioner.

As for the Forum, it has served a purpose which is not identical to ExCom or the Standing Committee. Here also, we wish to leave the options open and the next meeting of the Forum will be crucial in this respect.