

## **UNHCR's contribution to the Secretary-General's report on progress and implementation of the General Assembly Resolution 64/169 on the initiatives contributing to the activities in the framework of the International Year for People of African Descent**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) welcomes the invitation to contribute to the Secretary-General's report on the progress and implementation of the General Assembly Resolution 64/169 – in which 2011 is proclaimed as the International Year for People of African Descent –, in particular by providing information on activities carried out by UNHCR or being planned in the context of the this year.

As indicated in the UNHCR 2009 note entitled “Combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance through a strategic approach”, the promotion of tolerance, non-discrimination and equality is one of the key priorities for UNHCR worldwide. Special attention has been given to the ethnical and cultural diversity of the persons of concern to UNHCR. Therefore, indigenous communities as well as people of African descent have been included on an ongoing basis in all relevant activities.

Additionally, some specific activities have been specifically designed to contribute to the commemorations of the International Year for People of African Descent, including:

- UNHCR Ecuador, in April 2011, provided support for the organization of a photo exhibition “Para que nunca se nos olvide” (Let's never forget) as a joint effort with the Municipality of Esmeraldas, UNESCO and the International Center for Cultural Diversity;
- A special “feria” was organized by UNHCR in the Ecuadorian province of Imbabura, with the goal to promote integration among the different social groups living in Ecuador, including afro-descendants. This activity has been carried out within the context of the campaign “Convivir en Solidaridad” (Living Together in Solidarity);
- The afro-Colombian population is disproportionately affected by the situation of conflict and represents one of the groups at heightened risk, constituting approximately between 17 to 30 percent of all IDPs. Therefore, a million of afro-Colombians (half of them women) find themselves living in a situation of forced displacement, which represents about 30% of the total afro-Colombian population in the country. In Decision 005, the Constitutional Court recognized that the armed conflict has had a disproportionate and differential impact on afro-Colombian communities, given their particular characteristics. Displaced women

are even more vulnerable due to the multiple forms of discrimination they suffer because of their triple condition of “woman + black + displaced.” Taking into consideration this situation, UNHCR Colombia has developed targeted interventions aiming at the respect and the recognition of cultural diversity, protection of collective territories and the autonomy of indigenous and afro-Colombian communities, authorities and organizations. UNHCR’s initiatives in the country include the strengthening of the relations between State institutions and authorities of indigenous and afro-Colombian communities, by supporting regional ethnic authorities in displaced communities to better analyze their situation and to enhance their capacities through the incorporation of the differential approach in the identification of the risks and necessities of their communities, while designing strategies and action plans. UNHCR further promotes the legal framework to provide redress to IDPs whose rights have been violated, including restitution of lands, patrimony and housing, differentiated protection mechanisms and updating of the National Plan for the Assistance of IDPs, including afro-Colombians.

- An official launch of the International Year for Afro-descendants in Bogotá and in other countries in the region is planned for May 2011, with a presentation of a video on afro-Colombian youngsters on the Pacific Coast of Colombia. The video will be translated into English for wider circulation.

In general, UNHCR works closely with governments and municipalities to promote integration. Also, all activities in the region follow an Age, Gender and Diversity approach, and therefore afro-descendants, women, children, adolescents, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities (among others) are included in all activities and their special needs are systematically considered, as reflected by the following activities:

- In September 2010, in San Lorenzo, UNHCR supported the association of young afro-descendants in the organization of a street football festival as an event to promote peace. This event gathered both Ecuadorian nationals and Colombian refugees. Teams were made up of both men, women, Colombian and Ecuadorian nationals and no referees were present during the game. Instead, mediators promoted agreements on the rules for the games. The festival was initiated by a parade along the city that contained messages of peace and integration.
- The UNHCR sub-office of Medellín, Colombia, hosted the second series of meetings of the Regional Dialogues with refugee women and girls during in February 2011. Conclusions and recommendations from the Regional Dialogues will inform different events that will take place for the Commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness during 2011. The Dialogues offered

- the occasion to different IDP groups, of both rural and urban origin, including indigenous and Afro-Colombians, of working together and with UNHCR.
- In February 2011, Costa Rica, a Youth Conference “Ties without borders” (Lazos sin Fronteras) was organized, which included the participation of some 180 adolescents, who discussed the challenges of local integration for migrants and refugees. A declaration and an action plan to work towards a more inclusive society were presented. The Conference promoted local integration and non-discrimination and was organized by UNHCR, IOM, the Costa Rica Vice-Minister for Youth, the Council for Youth and Migration. The conference included participation of afro-descendant youngsters.
  - UNHCR Ecuador pays special attention to the ethnical and cultural diversity of the beneficiary population: a) improving the quality of live of the women and men who live in indigenous and afro-descendants communities along the border, b) strengthening their community organizations, and c) sensitizing about the necessity of helping refugees and displaced population in these communities. Work with afro-descendant and indigenous communities will continue along the northern border with Colombia.
  - UNHCR Panama participated in a conference hosted by OHCHR to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As part of the event, women of African and indigenous descent spoke about integration and non-discrimination challenges in Panama.
  - In Venezuela, UNHCR plans to continue working on community participation and self-management. Participatory assessments exercises will guide program designing and implementation for the promotion of specific solutions for displaced indigenous and afro-descendant communities. Leadership and human rights training to empower communities will also be undertaken.

UNHCR continues to actively engage in the debate and undertakes efforts to combat the challenges of discrimination, racism, and xenophobia from the particular perspective of its mandates to provide international protection to persons of concern – including People of African Descent – and to assist governments in finding durable solutions for them.

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**May 2001**