

Chairman's Summary
Inaugural meeting of the Forum
27 June 2003

General remarks

- We can be pleased that we have given Convention Plus a good start. I am very grateful to you for your lively deliberations. I believe that we have made important progress in advancing this initiative.
- Let me begin by summarizing the main thrust of our discussion.

Convention Plus and the Forum

1. I am pleased with the many expressions of support we have heard today for the initiative and encouraged by the recognition that Convention Plus is meant to enhance the existing international protection regime, and not a substitute for, or to undermine in anyway, the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. As many of you have pointed out, this initiative does not supplant these instruments, but can complement them and strengthen their implementation. Through the Global Consultations process we have learned that there can be no meaningful protection without the prospect of a durable solution.

2. There has also been widespread endorsement that Convention Plus can effect more equitable burden sharing and not burden shifting.

3. The Forum will maintain close links with the Executive Committee process, which must play its due role as we move forward with Convention Plus. In this regard, I am grateful to Ambassador Yimer for confirming that I can count on the active participation of ExCom in our work and its full support in achieving our shared objectives. We will report to ExCom with full transparency.

4. I agree with you that there is a need to keep the spirit of the Global Consultations process alive by encouraging the broad and active participation of not only interested States but also the NGO community. I welcome the NGOs' offer to participate actively in the work on the different clusters and in the implementation of the agreements that will eventually be reached.

5. In the same vein, we must remember that refugees are the reason we are here today. Their voice must also be heard as we take this process forward.

“Special agreements”: general

6. With respect to special agreements, there was wide support for situation- specific agreements, for example focusing on specific caseloads. Switzerland has proposed that further work on secondary and irregular movements be carried out through “case studies”. At the same time, we agree with Canada on the value of first establishing a generic framework of principles on an issue like resettlement, which can then be applied to specific agreements. Likewise, on the targeting of development aid, there seems to be a need to develop broad common understandings, while moving ahead on those initiatives that are already in train and learning lessons from those.

7. The African Group’s proposal to develop a framework of basic principles applying to burden-sharing is, therefore, interesting. A document of this sort could constitute a “preamble” to any future comprehensive solutions arrangements. This idea certainly merits further reflection.

8. As work progresses on the various strands that we have identified, we will also need to consider carefully, in each case, how the implementation of special agreements can be measured.

Resettlement

9. The Canadian paper served its purpose of stimulating a good exchange of views and raising the concerns and questions needed to be considered for a Convention Plus framework on resettlement.

10. It may be worth recalling the basic elements of this morning’s discussion, upon which there appears to be considerable consensus:

- Resettlement is one of three durable solutions and, coordinated with other approaches, it can contribute to comprehensive solutions for refugees that achieve effective burden sharing.
- The strategic use of resettlement has the potential for broadening the base of countries involved with resettlement. By expanding the pool of countries involved with resettlement we can achieve a qualitative difference for the refugees concerned.
- New approaches to resettlement should not be undertaken to the detriment of meeting, through resettlement, the individual protection needs of refugees, or to substitute for current resettlement efforts.

11. While there is consensus on these important areas, it was also recognized that other issues merit further reflection and future discussion in a broader context. These include:

- What should be the criteria for resettlement selection? Should it be based on broader criteria to include persons not covered by the 1951 Convention definition and/or those recognised on a group basis?
- Should broader resettlement activities also include provisions for group determinations, and how can we build upon our current efforts in this regard to identify groups for resettlement consideration?
- What other types of refugee situations, in addition to protracted situations, are appropriate for Convention Plus special agreements, and how can we best act upon refugee situations before they become protracted?
- The challenge for Convention Plus agreements is to find in each case the right balance of solutions. In doing so, we also must acknowledge that the capacities of developing countries to integrate refugees and the capacities of industrialized countries to resettle are not symmetrical.

Other initiatives

12. I would like to thank Switzerland for its offer to facilitate a discussion, and indeed a couple of “case studies”, on the complex issue of irregular and secondary movements of refugees and asylum-seekers. I encourage States and other partners to join Switzerland in this initiative. Several participants have noted that measures to meet the difficult challenges involved in addressing the phenomenon of irregular and secondary movements must fully respect international protection principles.

13. I wholeheartedly welcome the support and readiness of African countries to work hand-in-hand on Convention Plus initiatives. The concerns of countries hosting refugees must be centrally reflected in any future special agreements. These concerns include equitable burden-sharing, sustainability of solutions, effective partnerships and additional development assistance, particularly for those communities that host substantial numbers of refugees.

14. I welcome Denmark’s keen interest to pursue discussions with UNHCR and other partners on the targeting of development aid to achieve durable solutions. A similar interest was expressed by several other delegations, representing both donor and host countries.

15. Necessary as it is, development aid targeting refugee hosting communities must in most situations go hand-in-hand with expanding opportunities for voluntary repatriation and a strategic use of resettlement. Encouraging and supporting voluntary repatriation also requires additional, targeted development assistance to provide opportunities for the sustainable reintegration of returnees.

Next steps and future directions

16. Canada and UNHCR will be meeting shortly and will be approaching interested States with a view to constituting a broadly representative cross-section of stakeholders to take the discussion on resettlement further, along the lines identified this morning. It is important for those who work on the resettlement cluster to be representative of countries of first asylum, as well as traditional and emerging resettlement countries. In addition, we welcome the NGOs' offer to propose models for NGO participation in the Convention Plus process.

17. Likewise, we will be working closely with Switzerland to define the modalities of securing broad participation in the case studies which it has offered to develop. Together with Denmark and other States that have expressed an interest in continuing discussions on the targeting of development aid, we will find ways to make these discussions increasingly focused and concrete.

18. I look forward to presenting a balanced progress report on these various projects to ExCom next October. As to future meetings of the Forum, our deliberations today have impressed upon me the need for regular meetings. How soon the next meeting can take place will depend upon progress on "operationalizing" some of the ideas which have emerged from this first meeting. I shall revert to you soon with a proposed schedule.

Final remarks

19. I would like to stress two points by way of conclusion:

- Firstly, the whole exercise of Convention Plus is about burden- and responsibility-sharing, and this requires a multilateral approach. Our role is to bring together a truly multilateral coalition, to promote a convergence of interests between cash donors and host countries, between countries of origin, countries providing protection in regions of origin, and countries further away which also have a stake in solving refugee problems.
- Secondly, for this dialogue to be productive we must overcome suspicion. It is only natural to be suspicious of new initiatives, to seek ulterior motives or to decide that the new deal can only be unfair to oneself. I am making a strong plea to all of you not to become prisoners of suspicion. We should not end up defending a status-quo that we all agreed at the beginning is not satisfactory. In too many places refugee protection is becoming eroded for want of durable solutions. Let us remember that, for the refugee, the ultimate protection lies in the solution.
