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**Overview on UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and
North Africa (MENA)****A. Situational context including new developments****Syria situation**

As the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic entered its sixth year, it continued to trigger massive levels of displacement, with 6.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and over 4.8 million refugees in the neighbouring countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey). Intense fighting in the northern parts of the Syrian Arab Republic led to civilian casualties and the displacement of over 390,000 people since 1 February 2016. The humanitarian situation in the city of Aleppo and its surroundings severely deteriorated, with some 275,000 people in the eastern part of the city facing movement restrictions and in need of assistance. Water, shelter, food and healthcare remain the highest priorities. Overall, safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access in the country remained extremely challenging with 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including 5.47 million in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. UNHCR intensified its operations inside the country as lead agency for the shelter, non-food items and protection clusters, participating in most of the 76 inter-agency convoys that have taken place since the beginning of 2016. These convoys provided much-needed assistance to over 1.2 million people in hard-to-reach or besieged areas and other priority cross-line locations.

Despite the generosity of host governments and communities, refugees in neighbouring countries continue to face difficulty in accessing services. Many refugees have exhausted their savings and are sinking further into poverty. In Lebanon, the average debt held by refugee households increased by 16.5 per cent during the first quarter of 2016 and in Jordan, 90 per cent of Syrian refugees surveyed are now living below the poverty line. Together with UNDP, UNHCR continues to lead the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), a coordinated response of over 200 partners in support of the national response plans of the five main refugee-hosting countries.

Iraq situation

Since January 2014, the escalating violence in Iraq has led to the internal displacement of more than 3.4 million people. Between January and September 2016, around 300,000 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Europe. An important route ran through North Africa via the Mediterranean sea, with over 128,000 arrivals by sea to Italy, primarily departing from Libya, and to a lesser extent by land through Morocco towards the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (around 3,000 arrivals). Sea arrivals to Greece diminished greatly since March 2016, with some 160,000 arrivals from January to June 2016, compared to 780,000 arrivals during the previous 6-month period. Syrians represent 48% of all arrivals to Greece so far in 2016, followed by Afghans and Iraqis. Despite the ongoing armed conflict and the volatile security situation in Yemen, irregular arrivals by sea continued, followed by onward movement by land. Returns continue to be hampered by widespread destruction of infrastructure and the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance. Humanitarian partners estimate that over 10 million Iraqis currently require some form of humanitarian assistance. UNHCR's emergency response, in anticipation of

large-scale displacement from Mosul, includes establishing new camps, upgrading existing camps, and increasing the capacity for protection interventions. Turkey continues to host more than half of the over 230,000 registered Iraqi refugees in the region.

North Africa

The conflict in Libya continued to have severe consequences for civilians, with approximately 350,000 IDPs, over 300,000 returnees and an estimated 100,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in need of protection and humanitarian assistance - of which 38,000 had registered with UNHCR. International staff are still based in Tunis since they were evacuated from Libya in 2014. UNHCR has conducted two field assessment missions to Tripoli and to Benghazi in 2016. While access remains challenging, UNHCR continued to provide life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers through partners and national staff via hotlines and community centres in Benghazi and Tripoli. Cooperation with the Libyan Coast Guard and immigration authorities has further increased. UNHCR now has regular access to 14 of approximately 18 State-run detention centres throughout the country and is planning to expand its presence at disembarkation points, with two health posts already established at the ports of Tripoli and Zawya. UNHCR provided core relief-items and emergency medical care upon disembarkation and in detention facilities, identified people with specific needs and advocated for their release from detention. In Tunisia, UNHCR continues to monitor the situation at the border and to update its contingency plan accordingly.

In Mauritania, UNHCR assisted more than 42,000 Malian refugees in M'bera camp and focused its efforts on reinforcing the self-reliance of refugees through increased investment in education, vocational training and income-generating projects. In June, a tripartite agreement on the voluntary return to Mali was signed by Mali, Mauritania and UNHCR, however large-scale returns are not yet envisaged in light of current conditions in Mali.

UNHCR continued to provide life-saving assistance to 90,000 of the most vulnerable Sahrawi refugees in the five camps near Tindouf, Algeria. UNHCR redesigned its livelihoods and self-reliance activities with a special focus on youth, while maintaining the existing care and maintenance programme in order to reduce vulnerabilities and improve living conditions. Assistance, including the rehabilitation efforts following the floods in October 2015 has been hampered by limited finances.

Yemen

The complex humanitarian situation in Yemen continues to be alarming and the system-wide level-3 emergency response remains in place. Since the escalation of the conflict in Yemen at the end of March 2015, some 180,000 people have fled the country mostly to Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, and further afield.

An estimated 82 per cent of the 27 million people residing in Yemen is in need of humanitarian assistance, including 2.2 million IDPs and almost 950,000 IDP returnees; 3 million Yemenis are in need of immediate life-saving assistance. In 2016, UNHCR and partners distributed core relief items to more than 261,000 IDPs and emergency shelter kits to over 88,000 IDPs in 16 of Yemen's 22 governorates. A cessation of hostilities in April 2016 provided an opportunity for humanitarian actors to assist civilian populations previously out of their reach, however the lack of security continues to largely impede humanitarian delivery.

In addition, Yemen continued to host nearly 280,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Somalia. UNHCR provided life-saving protection and assistance to refugees and registered new arrivals. It offered legal services and carried out refugee status determination, detention monitoring and resettlement activities.

Mixed and onwards movements

Asylum-seekers and refugees continued to travel within large-scale mixed movements from Africa and the Middle East, seeking to reach Europe. UNHCR worked with governments and other partners to improve access to safety and protection from refoulement and to seek

solutions within existing migration frameworks. By engaging with refugee communities, the Office facilitated awareness raising activities in order to help persons of concern make informed decisions about the risks of onward movement and their options, including voluntary return and access to protection services.

The number of refugees and migrants using the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2016 has dropped dramatically after the effective closure of the “Balkans route” and as a result of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March. Between May and July 2016, over 90% of sea arrivals had arrived by the Central Mediterranean route, though the number of arrivals to Italy remains consistent with those of 2015.

An important route ran through North Africa, with departures by sea primarily from Libya or by land through Morocco towards the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Between January and September 2016, a total of 284,500 refugees and migrants arrived by sea to Europe, of which 33 per cent were Syrian. Despite the ongoing armed conflict and the volatile security situation in Yemen, irregular arrivals by sea continued, followed by onward movement by land.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Creating a favourable protection environment

In line with its efforts to promote the development of national asylum legislation, UNHCR contributed to the draft Arab Convention on regularizing the refugee situation in the Arab region. Progress was made, in Morocco and Tunisia, on draft laws on asylum, which are expected to be submitted to the respective Parliaments shortly. Throughout the region, UNHCR supported the training of lawyers and judges in asylum matters. In Jordan, for example, the courts instituted evidentiary rules to facilitate the access of refugees to justice and civil documentation. In Israel, UNHCR continued to promote solutions, as well as access to legal status and the rights associated with asylum.

UNHCR continued to conduct individual biometric registration for persons in need of international protection throughout the region. In Turkey, UNHCR supported the government to develop a project to verify the registration data of Syrian refugees. The Office conducted refugee status determination under its mandate, while also implementing activities designed to safeguard the integrity, quality and efficiency of the process.

In close collaboration with partners, UNHCR continued to invest in the capacity of refugees and communities as agents of protection. In Lebanon, for example, community volunteers ensured access to services and assistance for some 860,000 refugees and members of the host community between January 2015 and June 2016. Community-based interventions were carried out in most operations, with community outreach volunteers playing a critical role in countries with a predominantly urban refugee population such as Israel and Morocco.

A multi-sectoral strategy was launched in the region to support the “Global action plan to end statelessness”. In February 2016, UNHCR supported a regional dialogue on realizing women’s nationality rights in Bahrain with the active participation of the Government of Bahrain, along with civil society experts from Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. UNHCR has prioritized birth registration as a key tool to ensure that all children born to persons of concern to the Office receive evidence of their legal identity and nationality status, with particular attention to prevent statelessness among Syrian children.

UNHCR continues its démarches with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf governments aiming to ensure that Syrians residing in these States are protected against refoulement and have access to basic services. In Saudi Arabia, some Syrians and Yemenis were issued with visas and work permits, regularizing their stay in the country. Qatar exempted Syrians remaining on a visit visa from the monthly renewal fees and granted an exceptional extension of all visas for Syrians.

Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation

Child protection remains an important part of UNHCR's response in the region. Key priorities include responding to the need for longer-term care arrangements and durable solutions for unaccompanied and separated children, addressing child labour, and improving children's access to safe learning environments. In the first half of 2016, over 405,100 girls and boys participated in child protection or psychosocial support programmes. In coordination with UNESCO and UNICEF, UNHCR continued to provide safe learning environments for refugee children in primary and secondary education, as well as coordinating tertiary education opportunities and scholarships for refugees in the region. In addition, the ILO, UNICEF and UNHCR initiated a regional initiative to promote the inclusion of refugee children in national programmes to combat child labour, developing projects that target the specific needs of refugee children. Consultations took place with refugee youth in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Turkey to improve youth-inclusive programming and strengthen communication between refugee youth and humanitarian actors.

Initiatives to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continued in all operations, with over 82,000 survivors or persons at risk of SGBV receiving multi-sectoral services in 2016 in the context of the Syria situation alone. In the United Arab Emirates, UNHCR signed an agreement with the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children to put in place a referral mechanism in support of women and girl survivors of SGBV and human trafficking.

UNHCR continued to promote increased access to civil status documentation and quality maternal and reproductive health services for women. In Lebanon, 98 per cent of Syrian refugee births were attended to by skilled medical personnel who also issued birth notifications. Likewise, in Jordan 96 per cent of the deliveries by refugee women in urban, peri-urban and rural areas took place in a hospital.

UNHCR also promoted active and equal participation by women in leadership and management structures and equal access to livelihood opportunities. Both in Turkey and Jordan access to work permits has been expanded, as have legal employment opportunities in 2016. Authorities in Lebanon have committed to review its regulatory framework with a view to facilitating access to the job market.

Achieving durable solutions

Between January and August 2016, nearly 100,000 refugees from the region were submitted for resettlement, including approximately 75,000 Syrian and 6,000 Iraqi refugees. UNHCR continues to advocate for increased quotas, including for those currently hosted in countries in conflict, such as Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, as well as for Palestinian refugees in Iraq.

With respect to the Syria situation, there has been encouraging progress towards meeting the goal of cumulatively establishing 480,000 places for resettlement and other forms of admission from 2013 to 2018, with over 220,000 places made available by August 2016. However, resettlement needs continue to rise globally in light of the increasing numbers of refugees and growing vulnerabilities.

In addition to increasing resettlement capacity, UNHCR is advocating other pathways for admission, such as humanitarian visas, community-based private sponsorships, labour mobility schemes and family reunification, including for extended family members, continuing the work of the High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees of 30 March.

Mobilizing public, political, financial and operational support through strategic partnerships

UNHCR capitalized on existing partnerships, including by organizing a briefing for Organization of Islamic Cooperation member States in July 2016, in preparation for the High-level plenary summit of the United Nations General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. An extraordinary meeting of the Arab Regional

Consultative Process on Migration took place in August 2016 on the same subject, organized by the League of Arab States, UNHCR and IOM.

Sub-regional consultations took place in Tunisia and Amman, with a view to establishing a region-wide network of local and regional civil society actors. The objective of the network is to strengthen advocacy on displacement issues, build national non-governmental response capacities and share lessons learned on an array of issues, including emergency response and protection.

The International Humanitarian City, in Dubai, in collaboration with UNHCR, will host an annual Emergency Management Training workshop for humanitarian partners in the region. The first training will be held in November 2016.

UNHCR also continues to strengthen strategic partnerships in the region with the private sector, local and regional media outlets, and academic institutions. This has a positive impact on UNHCR's ability to mobilize public support and inform public debates in the region. The UNHCR Advisory Council for the Middle East and North Africa, set up to increase the Office's engagement with the private sector, held its first meeting in March 2016. Leading Arabic-language regional media outlets have shown a growing inclination towards comprehensive partnerships with UNHCR, including through capacity-building activities, pro-bono placement of advertisements and direct engagement with senior media correspondents.

C. Financial information

The initial projected financial needs for 2017, based on an assessment of needs and priorities, are \$2.170 billion. This amounts to over \$125 million more than the initial 2016 budget of \$2.045 billion approved by the Executive Committee, and \$80 million more than the current revised 2016 budget of \$2.09 billion as of end-August 2016. The current revised 2016 budget figure reflects both increases resulting from the new Yemen Supplementary Budget, and decreases in the regional Syria situation response, the 3RP, following a mid-year review.

As of 31 August 2016, contributions for the Middle East and North Africa region amounted to \$1,081 billion, or 52 per cent of the overall requirements of \$2.09 billion.
