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Update on UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific

A. Situational analysis including new developments

Although only 20 countries have acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the Asia-Pacific region continues to uphold its tradition of generosity by hosting millions of refugees and other displaced persons. The region's 45 countries and territories are home to more than 7.7 million persons of concern to UNHCR. Presenting unique protection challenges, around 63 per cent of persons of concern to UNHCR in the region are living in urban locations.

With some 3.5 million refugees, approximately one third of the global refugee population is hosted in the region, and 69 per cent of these refugees are Afghan nationals. While they are present in more than 80 countries worldwide, 96 per cent of the global Afghan refugee population continues to be hosted in just two countries: the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan.

Mixed migratory movements, particularly by sea, continue to be common in the region. During the first half of 2014, an estimated 20,000 people are said to have risked their lives to cross the Indian Ocean. Many were Rohingya who fled from Myanmar to elsewhere in the region, often arriving in poor health due to malnutrition and abuse during the journey. Several hundred people were also intercepted on boats heading to Australia. Tackling the issues caused by irregular movements remains a global priority for UNHCR. These movements affect all States, reinforcing the need for shared responsibility to address the many factors driving these flows. The Office remains concerned by measures taken by some States in the region to tighten border control, conduct offshore processing of asylum-seekers and forcibly return those seeking international protection. Although many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, these measures are contrary to international customary law and humanitarian principles.

Military operations in the North Waziristan province in mid-June resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people both within tribal areas in Pakistan as well as across the border into Afghanistan. UNHCR worked closely with the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan to help protect and assist those affected.

UNHCR has set up a taskforce in Kabul to lead strategy formulation and coordination of the refugee response in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, complementing the larger humanitarian response led by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator. To date, the needs of over 22,500 refugee families have been assessed by UNHCR and its partners. Overall the response efforts have led to the distribution of non-food items (NFIs) to 15,800 families and tents to 6,000 families. The number of refugees in need of assistance continues to increase. Access to water, food, shelter and healthcare continues to be an urgent priority, while funding is also needed for winterization kits, sanitation infrastructure and demining operations in the Gulam camp.

In Pakistan, at the request of the Government, UNHCR and other UN partners, along with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were asked to expand their response to the internal displacement situation to include displacement from North Waziristan. In coordination with the Government, this response will help ensure that the protection and humanitarian assistance needs of the displaced are met in a timely manner and in

accordance with international humanitarian standards. Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, UNHCR leads three of the 11 clusters on internal displacement: 1) protection, 2) emergency shelter/NFI and 3) camp coordination/camp management. A supplementary budget of US\$ 16.1 million was established and an appeal launched. According to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), more than 1 million individuals (some 97,500 families) have claimed that they were displaced from the North Waziristan Agency (NWA). The total population of internally displaced persons (IDPs), as verified by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), however, stands at an estimated 580,300 individuals (57,900 families). Thus far, some 66,500 NFI kits have been distributed among these IDPs. According to the authorities, returns to North Waziristan are not expected to begin before next year.

After 40 years in existence, UNHCR's office in Viet Nam closed at the end of June 2014. UNHCR will continue its support to the Government and cover activities in Viet Nam through its Regional Office in Bangkok.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving strategic priorities

Safeguarding protection and asylum space

In countries without existing national procedures, UNHCR carries out refugee status determination, supports the establishment of national procedures, and promotes protection-sensitive migration management systems, including alternatives to detention for asylum-seekers. In countries with established asylum systems, UNHCR is providing capacity-building and technical expertise.

Irregular maritime movements of mixed populations that include persons of concern to UNHCR have been prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region for many years. However, movements through South-East Asia, largely originating from the Bay of Bengal, have increased at a rapid rate following inter-communal violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State in June 2012. In the last two years, some 87,000 people are estimated to have departed by sea from the Bangladesh and Myanmar border area alone. Additionally, there are increasing reports of abuse, exploitation and trafficking of people on these already perilous journeys by sea.

UNHCR continues to advocate for a broad consensus throughout the region on rescue-at-sea measures, disembarkation arrangements and burden-sharing. It is also working with States on temporary stay arrangements for those who have sought refuge across borders, including access to required documentation, protection against arbitrary detention and respect for family unity. UNHCR reiterates its call for States to respect international law, including the principle of *non-refoulement*.

The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime is an important and ongoing initiative that promotes regional cooperation between coastal and non-coastal States to strengthen protection at sea and to address the drivers of irregular maritime movements. At a Special Ministerial Conference in Indonesia in August 2013, States reaffirmed their commitment to the Bali Process and agreed to a number of joint actions through the Jakarta Declaration on Addressing Irregular Movements at Sea.

In April 2014, UNHCR and the Government of Indonesia co-chaired an international workshop to follow up on implementation of the Jakarta Declaration. It was attended by 14 countries of origin, transit and destination in the region, as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). States reiterated their commitment to the principle of burden-sharing, contrary to what were referred to as "burden-shifting" practices, and a range of coordinated practical measures were recommended. Participants also agreed to a process to develop regional guidelines on rescue-at-sea, focusing on the definition of distress at sea, the assessment of conditions upon arrival, the definition of place of safety for disembarkation, and the criteria for the treatment of people upon disembarkation.

In July 2013, the Pakistani Government extended the validity of Proof of Registration (PoR) cards until the end of 2015. The Government has since conducted a PoR renewal exercise, and it continues to register new born children as well as provide birth certificates and PoR cards to registered children who have reached five years of age. It is estimated that by the end of 2015, an additional 150,000 new born children will have been registered, 180,000 children issued with PoR cards and approximately 330,000 birth certificates provided to children. In total, 1.4 million PoR cards have been renewed for Afghans by the Government of Pakistan. Such measures contribute significantly to the protection of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Seeking solutions for protracted refugee situations

The Afghanistan situation remains the largest protracted refugee situation in the world. Some 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees are living in neighbouring Pakistan - making it the top refugee hosting country in the world – while the Islamic Republic of Iran is home to 840,000 registered Afghan refugees. The region is also home to other long-staying refugees such as those from Myanmar in Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia and refugees from Bhutan in Nepal. Some 10,000 Afghan refugees returned to their country of origin in 2014.

UNHCR continues to work with the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan on the implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR). In 2014, in order to operationalize the SSAR and mobilize donor support, Governments in the region, in cooperation with more than 50 humanitarian and development partners, developed country-specific portfolios of projects. The portfolios prioritize the empowerment of young people through education and skills training, enabling them to contribute to the development of their countries upon return. During the course of this year, the High Commissioner undertook missions to the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan to launch the portfolios of projects and to galvanize international support. As the humanitarian and development needs in Afghanistan and the two main host countries remain, UNHCR will continue promoting the SSAR as a platform for consensus-building, strengthening of existing partnerships and engaging new actors.

In Nepal, the third country resettlement programme for refugees from Bhutan is ongoing, with more than 5,800 individuals resettled during the first seven months of 2014. Since the start of the programme in late 2007, around 92,000 refugees have departed Nepal for resettlement in third countries, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

In 2014, UNHCR also made a final assessment to ascertain the interest of the remaining refugees in Nepal in group resettlement. At the conclusion of the exercise in June, some 2,000 refugees opted not to declare an interest in group resettlement. However, UNHCR believes that a much higher number of refugees are likely to remain in Nepal for reasons of ineligibility or voluntary withdrawal from the resettlement process. Following the assessment exercise, it is estimated that an additional 10,000 to 12,000 refugees may be resettled in the coming two years, leaving a residual caseload of 10,000 to 15,000 refugees, for whom other durable solutions will need to be sought in close cooperation with concerned governments.

Ensuring protection and durable solutions for internally displaced persons

In response to Typhoon Haiyan, which displaced some 4 million people in the Philippines at the end of 2013, UNHCR co-led the protection cluster together with the Government and delivered emergency relief items to more than half a million people, focusing on vulnerable populations and those in remote areas. UNHCR provided assistance to over 600,000 persons, including 10,000 tents and non-food items, 100,000 plastic sheets used for shelter, 88,000 blankets and 14,000 kitchen sets. In addition, the Office distributed 19,000 solar lanterns, which helped improve the physical safety of persons with specific

vulnerabilities. The Office also reached out to remote communities, promoting child protection and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. In consultation with the Government, UNHCR conducted a free mobile civil registration project in the 20 affected municipalities. Between April and June 2014, over 115,000 people affected by the typhoon were issued vital civil documentation, including birth certificates and marriage certificates.

In response to ongoing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State, UNHCR continues to prioritize protection and humanitarian assistance efforts, while working towards durable solutions. In addition, the Office works with the Government to address the legal status of those from Myanmar without citizenship, inside and outside the country. There are an estimated 400,000 IDPs in Myanmar. This includes some 140,000 people who remain displaced in Rakhine State and are living in 79 camp and camp-like settlements. In Kachin State and the southeast region of Myanmar, UNHCR continues to focus on preparatory activities in the event that conditions become conducive for voluntary return to places of origin over the next few years.

Reducing and preventing stateless and protecting stateless people

The year 2014 marks the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. In November, the Office will launch its global campaign to end statelessness by 2024. This is especially pertinent for the Asia-Pacific region, where more than 1.4 million remain stateless or are at risk of statelessness.

An International Conference on Migration and Statelessness jointly organized by the Government of Turkmenistan, IOM and UNHCR took place in June in Ashgabat. It identified best practices for addressing situations of statelessness and for improving the management of migration in Central Asia and globally. Over 40 delegations from governments, international organizations and civil society participated in the conference. Participants reaffirmed that the identification of stateless persons, law reform, accession to the statelessness conventions and international cooperation are all key to preventing or resolving statelessness situations. A number of governments from the Central Asian region, such as Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan have already taken positive steps towards addressing statelessness in their respective countries.

C. Financial information

The 2014 comprehensive needs assessment budget for Asia and the Pacific approved by the Executive Committee at its 64th session remains \$581.4 million. The financial requirements for the Afghan situation, comprising operations in the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, represent some 62 per cent of this total. Financial requirements for the Myanmar operation represent some 12 per cent, and the remaining 26 per cent is shared by 18 small and medium-sized operations. Continued funding support for the Afghan situation is critical to ensure the momentum for solutions in this third year of the Solutions Strategy, and a funding shortfall in other sub-regions would have a serious impact on the delivery of key protection activities.

By comparison, the Executive Committee budget for the Asia-Pacific region for 2013 was increased during the year by \$68.3 million, bringing the year-end budget to \$594.7 million. This increase was primarily due to the supplementary budgets that were established in response to unforeseen humanitarian needs resulting from population displacement in Myanmar and the emergency humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.