

COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

LEBANON

PART I – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SUMMARY

Lebanon is not a signatory to either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to refugees. Likewise, there is no designated government entity or established procedure for refugee eligibility. In the absence of government procedures and a relevant body, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination interviews and recognizes refugees pursuant to our mandate.

In Lebanon refugees are admitted and tolerated temporarily with the understanding that UNHCR will identify durable solutions for them outside Lebanon. Over the last year, UNHCR witnessed deterioration in the treatment of refugees by the Lebanese authorities. The majority of UNHCR's caseload consists of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers. Most enter the country illegally from Syria with the help of smugglers. A few refugees enter Lebanon, as stowaways while others entered legally but due to circumstances after they left their countries of origins are unable to return home in safety.

Certainly, one of the reasons that many refugees and asylum seekers are attracted to Lebanon is its religious diversity. There are 18 different recognized religious communities in Lebanon all of whom are active politically and all of whom play a role in maintaining the country's fragile equilibrium.

Refugees generally fall in the most disadvantaged group in Lebanon. Lebanese legislation prohibits refugees from seeking employment and they do not enjoy any social benefits. Most refugees and asylum seekers resort to illegal employment in order to survive. Unfortunately, UNHCR's financial assistance to refugees, due to financial constraints, remains very limited. In addition UNHCR covers some 70% of incurred medical costs at designated hospital, clinics and pharmacies and also assists refugee families to offset some of the costs associated with their children attending primary and secondary school.

Because the current country conditions do not permit the majority of UNHCR's caseload to return to their country of origin and due to the lack of local integration prospects, resettlement is the only durable solution for refugees in Lebanon.

Under these conditions, OCM's objectives will focus mainly on ensuring protection for refugees and asylum seekers and providing them with assistance pending a durable solution.

With respect to assistance, the deterioration of the protection situation affected an increasing number of refugees, as they are no longer able to find work and have no alternative but to rely on UNHCR's assistance. This will also mean allocating a special fund to assist those who are in detention.

Concerning protection and durable solutions, the office will continue to carry out its eligibility functions in the absence of any government institution to that effect and prepare submissions for resettlement to third countries, namely USA, Canada and Australia.