



# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Executive Committee Summary**

**Country: Tunisia**

**Planning Year: 2007**

## **Part I: OVERVIEW**

### **1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment**

UNHCR started its operations in Tunisia in 1957 with an assistance program for Algerian refugees and their subsequent repatriation between April and July 1962. Since 1963, UNHCR has an Honorary Representation office in Tunisia. The Honorary Representative (HR) is active in the area of promotion of refugee law by holding public presentations and publishing books in Arabic on International Protection of refugees.

Tunisia is signatory to the 1951 Convention, the 1967 protocol and is also party to the 1969 OAU Convention. As well, Tunisia is party to the 1954 Convention relating to the status of stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the reduction of statelessness. The country ratified all major human rights treaties. However, Tunisia is yet to adopt a national legislation on refugees and establish a government agency to deal with asylum affairs. Refugees are subject to national laws applicable to all foreigners.

UNHCR Tunis handles the responsibility for carrying out refugee status determination (RSD) under its mandate. The authorities handle the issuance of residence permits to recognized refugees and the issuance of Convention Travel Documents. Non-refoulement is guaranteed by the Tunisian Constitution for political refugees. Residence permits are only granted to refugees that are recognized by UNHCR. This permit allows refugees to work in the country.

The office maintains relations with several NGO's including the Tunisian Red Crescent, CARITAS, ATL MST SIDA (Association Tunisienne pour la Lutte contre les Maladies Sexuellement Transmissibles et le SIDA), ICRC, and the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR).

The caseload is modest amounting to 87 persons at 31 December 2005. The majority rely on UNHCR assistance to survive. In the absence of NGOs at the national level or government agencies tasked with handling refugee and asylum seeker affairs, UNHCR is the sole responsible body for refugee protection in the country.

A needs assessment exercise is currently undertaken by UNHCR Tunis with a view of reviewing the care and maintenance program and to ensure mainstreaming of gender, age and diversity into all programs as well as to help in re-evaluating financial assistance provided to refugees.

#### **a. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions**

During 2007, UNHCR will promote refugee law and protection principles as well as provide public information on its mandate among different actors to encourage public tolerance of the refugee cause and better understanding of its role, as the main international refugee protection agency in the country.

UNHCR will continue its efforts at getting approval for its intervention in migration and other issues such as access to people of concern in detention. It will also ensure that all refugees and asylum seekers have access to health and education services.

As for Sub-Saharan African refugees in Tunisia, most of them came to Tunis with a motivation to move to a third country. Their preferred durable solution is resettlement, even though some may have prospects for local integration. Resettlement will be strategically resorted to, particularly when no other solution is evident.

HIV/AIDS information sessions tackling modes of transmission, prevention and testing options as well as information on treatment were initiated in 2006 with a view of sensitizing people of concern in Tunisia on this issue. These sessions will continue, and activities in this area are likely to be expanded, in 2007.

## **Part II: COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS AND PARTNERSHIP**

### **a. Outcomes of joint planning and management of identified gaps**

The Honorary Representative maintains excellent relations with other UN agencies in the country. UNFPA has allocated funds to activities in the area of HIV/AIDS for joint activities in 2007. Relations were also initiated between UNHCR and UNAIDS for the organization of HIV/AIDS sensitization sessions for people of concern.

IOM and UNHCR are likely to cooperate in 2007 in the field of migration together with the UNDP. Partnership with ICRC also needs to be strengthened.

Partnership exists with the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) that takes care of the organization of a workshop for NGOs on international protection and migration. The association of international studies also cooperates with the office on various promotions of refugee law activities.

The financial assistance program is directly managed by UNHCR, with the Tunisian Red Crescent Society serving as UNHCR's main implementing partner and is involved in the implementation of all assistance activities. In a few cases, CARITAS may provide financial assistance to persons of concern.

Several gaps have been identified and prioritized in Tunisia's protection operation for the coming years: a) ensuring that minimum standards of international protection are met for all people of concern, b) ensuring better allocation of financial assistance based on specific criteria, c) ensuring that health needs of refugees of all ages are met including those requiring emergency medical care, d) ensuring that all people of concern have access to either formal or informal type of education and e) building capacity of the staff of partner agencies, including TRC and CARITAS to ensure better service and protection delivery.

### **b. Comprehensive needs and Contributions**

The Tunisian Red Crescent provides UNHCR a small office in its premises for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees, registration and refugee status determination activities, as well as distribution of financial assistance. It also enables

refugees and asylum seekers the free use of telephone and fax and occasionally it distributes food, clothing and blankets, educational material, etc. Medical assistance is also provided to people of concern, through a doctor who is always present at the premises of the Tunisian Red Crescent Society.

The Movement des Scouts Tunisiens organizes in its premises every 20<sup>th</sup> of June the celebration of World Refugee Day. As well, it organizes each year a summer camp where UNHCR has a tent to show short films on protection activities around the world. Information about refugees and distribution of UNHCR documents take place regularly.

The Arab Institute for Human Rights is one of UNHCR partners in the promotion of refugee law and protection principles. UNHCR contributes to its seminars on human rights in Tunis and other Arab capitals where refugee issues are raised. UNHCR and AIHR also cooperated on the publication of an Arabic book for children entitled “Al Masseur” (Destiny) and dedicated to children of age 12 to 15 to sensitize them on protection problems faced by refugee children.

The NGO “Association des Etudes Internationales,” offers another forum for the dissemination of refugee law and international protection. UNHCR contributed to its training seminars by offering lectures on relevant issues. The lectures, either in Arabic or in French, are reproduced in its publication entitled “Etudes Internationales”.

The Tunis Branch of Caritas International co-operates closely with UNHCR in handling assistance (supplementary assistance for housing for a maximum of one year, medical care, clothes, blankets, limited assistance to education for children under 12 years old) to asylum seekers and refugees. Finally, the NGO El-Taller is engaged in Social and migration activities, helping refugees to find solutions to their problems.