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## Update on UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and North Africa

### A. Situational analysis

#### *Syria situation*

Since the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic began over four years ago, more than 3 million people have sought refuge in the region. With the registration of new arrivals taking place at an average rate of over 100,000 every month, the number of Syrian refugees in the region continues to grow. In addition, over 50,000 Syrians have sought asylum in more than 90 countries outside the immediate region.

Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, an estimated 10.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 6.45 million who are internally displaced. The security situation remains volatile and humanitarian access is an ongoing challenge. Despite these constraints, between January and September 2014 UNHCR provided basic relief items, including sleeping mats, thermal blankets and kitchen sets, to more than 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). More than 61,000 IDPs have also been provided with assistance to rehabilitate their housing.

In February 2014, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2139 aimed at improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since then, progress on the ground has been uneven, and safe and unhindered access to populations in need of assistance has not always been provided. UNHCR and its partners were, nonetheless, able to seize the opportunity and expand humanitarian operations in some areas. In July 2014, the Security Council adopted resolution 2165, authorizing the use of routes across conflict lines and four border crossings to deliver humanitarian assistance to persons in need throughout the country through the most direct routes. Following the adoption of the resolution, UNHCR deployed a team to support inter-agency coordination of cross-border humanitarian assistance from Turkey, and has participated in all UN-coordinated movements from Turkey and Jordan.

The pace and scale of displacement to Lebanon continues to be overwhelming. As of mid-September, nearly 1.2 million refugees were registered with UNHCR. In August, clashes in the north-eastern Lebanese municipality of Aarsal resulted in new displacement and widespread property damage, affecting both Lebanese and Syrian families. The security situation remains volatile and generally unfavourable for the restoration of a regular humanitarian presence. In Turkey, some 833,000 Syrians were registered with UNHCR by the end of August 2014. However, the Turkish Government, which leads the refugee response and extends temporary protection to all Syrians in the country, estimates that there are at least 1.15 million Syrians in Turkey.

Jordan, which is currently hosting more than 610,000 Syrian refugees, witnessed a significant number of new arrivals in the first half of 2014. The majority are living in host communities, which are concentrated in urban centres in the central and northern governorates. The Government opened a new camp (Azraq) in April 2014, complementing Zaatari, the largest refugee camp in the country. More than 215,000 Syrian refugees were registered with UNHCR in Iraq by the end of August, with more than 95 per cent hosted in the Kurdistan region. The growing number of refugees is placing additional strains on the

local infrastructure. More than 139,000 Syrian refugees are registered with UNHCR in Egypt, and the Government estimates that the country is hosting more than 300,000 Syrians. Some 18,350 Syrians have also sought asylum in other countries in North Africa, including Libya.

#### *Iraq situation*

In 2014, the deteriorating security situation and armed conflict in Anbar and Ninewa Governorates, and in particular the takeover of Mosul by armed elements, have triggered significant waves of internal displacement. As estimated by the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), 1.8 million people have been displaced in the country between January and August 2014. This figure does not include nearly one million persons that remain displaced in central Iraq as a result of sectarian violence that occurred in 2006. Ongoing clashes and fighting in other areas of the country continue to force people to flee from their homes.

Approximately 850,000 IDPs have sought safety in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, which is also hosting more than 97 per cent of the Syrian refugees in the country. In mid-August 2014, the internal displacement situation was declared a system-wide level-3 emergency. UNHCR has scaled up its response to the IDP crisis and launched a massive logistics operation to bring in relief supplies by air, land and sea. The largest single aid distribution organized by UNHCR in more than a decade targeted some 500,000 IDPs.

UNHCR is leading two IDP clusters in Iraq: 1) protection and 2) shelter/NFI (non-food items). A camp coordination and camp management is currently being established. UNHCR is also scaling up its emergency shelter and winterization efforts; providing the Kurdistan Regional Government with expertise in shelter and site planning; implementing country-wide cash assistance programmes; conducting protection monitoring; and establishing call centres for IDPs seeking information, services and referrals. In addition, the Office is assisting with emergency registration for IDPs and ongoing refugee registration throughout northern and central Iraq.

The situation in Iraq has also had an impact on neighbouring countries, with a marked increase of Iraqis seeking refuge across borders. So far, the number of Iraqi refugees arriving in neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year has reached nearly 136,000. In Turkey alone, the Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants, UNHCR's implementing partner, receives approximately 1,000 individual applications for asylum per day.

#### *Libya*

The security situation in Libya is increasingly volatile. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya estimates that at least 100,000 people have been internally displaced by the recent fighting.

Over 18,700 Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers are registered with UNHCR in Libya, of which a significant number may have moved towards Europe following recent developments. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and others stranded in conflict zones, many of whom are unable to move to safer areas due to heavy shelling, increased crime and insecure routes. To the extent possible, national partners continue to provide assistance, and a hotline for refugees and asylum-seekers has been established to offer information, advice and referrals.

UNHCR and national partners are distributing core relief items, including medical supplies, and conducting cross-border monitoring missions into Libya to assess the needs and provide assistance to IDPs. Most international staff of UN partners and non-governmental organizations have been evacuated to Tunisia. The protection cluster, working from Tunisia, is identifying ways to reach persons of concern inside Libya. Contingency plans have been developed by the Governments of Egypt and Tunisia, in coordination with UNHCR.

*Yemen*

Yemen continues to face a complex humanitarian situation, characterized by ongoing insecurity, extreme poverty and economic difficulties, which also contribute to reduced access to food, basic services and livelihood opportunities. The security situation remains volatile and incidents continue to occur regularly. Tensions in the northern and central Governorates have escalated.

There are currently more than 334,000 IDPs registered across the country, particularly in the north. Conflict in Amran triggered several waves of displacement in 2014, including some 45,000 newly displaced in July. Many of these IDPs were displaced multiple times, and around 31,000 have reportedly returned, although verification remains difficult due to limited access. Conflict in Al-Jawf Governorate in August reportedly displaced at least 650 families. In the south, the majority of individuals displaced in Abyan in 2011 have voluntarily returned to their homes, with the support of a coordinated inter-agency humanitarian response.

Despite these challenges, Yemen continued to receive a considerable influx of people fleeing the Horn of Africa across the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. The country maintains an open door policy for Somali and Syrian refugees, granting access to a range of public services and providing employment opportunities.

Migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees continue to be smuggled and, in some instances, trafficked into Yemen, facing serious human rights abuses during their journey and often ending up stranded in the country without any documentation. There were over 48,000 new arrivals between January and August 2014. More than 245,000 refugees (mostly Somali nationals) currently hosted in Yemen have become increasingly vulnerable, relying heavily on humanitarian assistance, while the operational and security environment hampered access and the regular delivery of aid.

In March 2014, an inter-agency humanitarian response plan for Yemen was launched, seeking \$592 million to assist some 7.6 million of the 14.7 million persons in need of humanitarian assistance in the country. In 2013, 4.3 million people received humanitarian assistance in Yemen.

*Onward movements and protection at sea*

The Middle East and North Africa continues to be a region of origin, destination and transit for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Countries in North Africa are particularly affected by mixed migratory movements, including of persons in transit to Europe or other countries. Trafficking, smuggling and the increasing number of persons travelling on dangerous routes by sea are of growing concern.

By September 2014, Italy had reported some 117,000 arrivals from Libya, compared to less than 43,000 in 2013. The number of deaths and people missing at sea as a result of these movements has reached over 2,000 in 2014, of which 1,700 were during the past three months alone. The surge in the number of people departing by sea from Libya, including many Syrians, has been taking place in parallel with increasing insecurity and political volatility in Libya.

**B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities**

UNHCR continues to face challenges posed by multiple emergencies in the region. Increasingly complex protection issues are emerging, while insecurity is hindering humanitarian operations and limiting access to persons of concern.

*Favourable protection environment*

UNHCR is responding to a growing interest among States in the region in developing national asylum systems. Morocco is currently in the process of adopting legislation on asylum. Since June 2014, the Office is also working closely with the Moroccan *Bureau des Réfugiés et des Apatrides* on the registration and regularization of Syrian refugees. The

regularization of 550 non-Syrian refugees was completed by August 2014. All of these refugees were issued documentation. Tunisia is in the process of finalizing a law which establishes the legal framework for asylum in the country.

UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to 90,000 Saharawi refugees living in camps near Tindouf, Algeria. This year, extra rations were provided to address the needs of extremely vulnerable refugees. Family visits between refugees in the camps and their families in the Territory continued as part of UNHCR's confidence building measures programme, with an aim to link families divided by the conflict for the past 38 years. Nearly 1,000 persons have benefited from the programme this year, bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 20,700 since the beginning of the operation in March 2004. Meanwhile, cultural seminars in Portugal and coordination meetings in Geneva continued. A fifth cultural seminar is planned to take place in October, benefiting some 40 people from both the camps and the Territory. The next coordination meeting with the parties, Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO, and Algeria and Mauritania as neighbouring countries, and UNHCR, is planned for early November 2014.

In May 2014, the authorities in Mauritania completed the biometric registration of all of the registered refugees settled in Mbera camp (some 52,800 persons) as part of a nationwide refugee registration process which includes those living in urban areas. Verification is currently ongoing for some 19,800 persons outside the camp who could be recognized as Mauritanian nationals.

In Egypt, refugee status determination was completed for the 85 refugees remaining in Salloum camp near the Egyptian-Libyan border. In Israel, UNHCR continues to promote access to refugee status determination procedures. The Office is also advocating for an improvement in conditions for 51,000 persons of concern in the country. As a result of increased security and legislative measures, which have restricted asylum space, the number of new arrivals in Israel continues to decrease compared to previous years.

Following the Yemeni Government's adoption of a national policy on IDPs, UNHCR is working closely with the authorities to ensure its implementation.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR and its partners continued to strengthen, under difficult conditions, community-based protection support through 11 community centres and a network of 250 IDP and refugee outreach volunteers. Through these mechanisms, recreational activities, psycho-social support and legal counselling are provided. Particular attention is given to personal documentation, including civil registration, and addressing/preventing family separation.

With regard to statelessness, Bahrain's Cabinet issued a decision in January 2014 which allows Bahraini women to confer nationality to their children, subject to certain conditions. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued regulations in 2014 which permit the children of Saudi mothers and non-Saudi fathers to apply for nationality on a discretionary basis under a point system. Jordan and Lebanon have taken concrete steps linked to birth registration which will help prevent statelessness among Syrian refugees.

#### *Security from violence and exploitation*

Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) remains a protection risk faced by refugees across the Middle East and North Africa region. UNHCR continues to implement a multisectoral, coordinated and community-based approach to prevent and respond to SGBV. Identified survivors are provided with assistance through referral pathways established in all countries of the region. Case management capacity has been steadily enhanced to ensure that response services, including medical care, are accessible, safe and confidential.

In the past two years the number of refugee children in the region has increased by 30 per cent, passing the 2 million mark. UNHCR is prioritizing activities aimed at strengthening national and community-based child protection systems. Investments in education and protection space remain an ongoing priority to ensure that a future generation of refugee children is not lost. In October 2014, His Highnesses Sheikh Dr. Sultan Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah is hosting, in cooperation with UNHCR, a regional conference on the protection

of refugee children and adolescents to explore concrete ways to strengthen child protection systems.

*Durable solutions*

UNHCR remains committed to achieving durable solutions in the region, by exploring innovative approaches and fostering self-reliance. In 2014, UNHCR outlined an overarching strategy and roadmap for the harmonization of cash-based programming. Support to host communities and international solidarity and burden-sharing continue to be vital to solutions strategies in the region. Resettlement is key in this regard and remains an important protection tool. UNHCR submitted 6,000 Iraqi refugees for resettlement in 2013. As of June 2014, 13,500 Syrian refugees were submitted for resettlement or humanitarian admission to third countries.

As of mid-August 2014, some 2,800 individuals in camp Hurriya were determined to have international protection needs, of which 380 were relocated outside of Iraq. Finding durable solutions for this population remains a challenge, and UNHCR calls on countries to generously accept those in need of international protection.

In Mauritania, UNHCR is implementing a solutions strategy to enhance the self-reliance and socio-economic well-being of refugees. This includes scaling up investments in the four key areas of education, livelihoods, peaceful coexistence and the protection environment in the country of asylum.

In Morocco, the Government is working on the local integration of recently regularized refugees.

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

UNHCR’s enhanced partnerships with various public and private entities in the region have resulted in substantial support for the Syria situation and other humanitarian operations around the globe. Kuwait hosted the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in early 2014, generating some US\$ 2.4 billion in pledges to fund humanitarian operations both inside the Syrian Arab Republic and in neighbouring countries, a significant portion of which was channelled through UNHCR. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia responded generously to the humanitarian emergency in Iraq, with a contribution of US\$ 500 million, of which UNHCR received US\$ 88 million for its activities targeting IDPs.

**C. Financial information**

The initial 2014 budget approved by the Executive Committee for the Middle East and North Africa region was \$1,532.2 million. As at end-August 2014, the overall financial requirements for the region reached \$1,758.5 million.

As of August, contributions for the region reached over \$841.2 million to meet the needs of refugees and IDPs in the Middle East and North Africa region. Despite the generous donor support, the needs are still greater than the means available to address them.

