



Refugee protection in countries affected by recent events in the Arab World

The first six months of 2011 have seen a series of dramatic events in the Arab World. UNHCR has received queries about the resulting impact on international protection *inside* affected countries. With some exceptions, and despite ongoing events, crucial protection space has thus far remained open.

Egypt

In Egypt, UNHCR operations have remained at the same level as before the events of this past spring. The border with Libya has remained open and the large numbers of people arriving in Egypt have had access to safe haven, including in many instances being hosted by Egyptian families.

Libya

With Libya, UNHCR's ability to provide protection to around 8,000 refugees inside the country was substantially constrained even before the current crisis there. At present we maintain only minimal operationality in Tripoli and we are beginning to operate in the East. UNHCR is particularly concerned for the situation of sub-Saharan Africans needing protection. Some of this population remains in Libya while others have left. For those remaining in Libya the situation is particularly threatening, with people at risk of hostility from both pro- and anti-government groups because of perceived association with mercenaries.

Syria

Not counting Palestinian refugees falling under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the largest recipient country in the region for refugees is Syria. Here, borders have remained open to Iraqi refugees and refugee protection space has been fully preserved. Schools continue to receive refugee children, health services continue to be provided, and ongoing events are not meaningfully impacting the refugee population. UNHCR, together with its national partners, is continuing to work to provide significant assistance to large numbers of Iraqi refugees, and we are seeking ways to restore resettlement levels to previous highs.

Tunisia

In the past, UNHCR operations in Tunisia were constrained, however that has changed dramatically this year. Tunisia is keeping its borders open to the very large numbers of people fleeing Libya. And in the case of those who are seeking asylum, that has been fully granted. Children have been allowed to go to school, and medical and other support has been provided. We have recently signed a cooperation agreement with the government and we are intensifying our engagement to help meet needs.

Yemen

Yemen's hospitality norms towards refugees and asylum seekers have prevailed thus far despite political instability and accompanying insecurity. Nonetheless the risks continue to be substantial. In early June two Somali refugees were killed in clashes between tribesmen and security forces near the capital Sana'a. UNHCR has maintained its programmes to support more than 100,000 refugees but our staff are contending with insecurity levels that impose physical limitations on the work they can do.

Overall, UNHCR believes that despite ongoing events, protection space inside countries of the region has not been substantially degraded. Traditions of Islamic and Arabic hospitality towards refugees endure, and UNHCR has for the most part been able to continue its work. It is our hope that this situation will continue.

Further information

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