

41st Meeting of the Standing Committee, March 2008

Oral report on the first meeting of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 11 and 12 December 2007

by

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- ✚ Mr Chairman, Delegates will recall that the first High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges took place here at the Palais des Nations on 11 and 12 December last year on the theme of "refugee protection, durable solutions and international migration". Shortly thereafter, UNHCR circulated the "Chairman's summary" which reflected the main outcomes of the event. Today, I will overview the Dialogue and its results briefly, and concentrate on the follow-up actions the Office has undertaken since then.
- ✚ The Dialogue brought together 300 participants, including representatives of 80 States, 10 intergovernmental organizations including the International Organization for Migration, 10 members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, 23 NGOs and 10 experts. It was structured on both a plenary format and a series of breakout sessions which were moderated by senior officials from Canada, Sweden and Tanzania. UNHCR would like to renew its appreciation to all the participants who took part in making what the High Commissioner considered to have been a very successful event.
- ✚ The main outcomes and action points of the Dialogue are contained in the Chairman's Summary I have alluded to already. Those action points can be grouped into four broad categories namely, first, the establishment of an informal working group to examine the "gaps" affecting migrants in need of humanitarian interventions but who are not covered by an established protection regime; second, the application of UNHCR's Ten Point Plan of Action; third, addressing protection and solutions needs arising in the maritime context (otherwise known as the "rescue at sea" issue); and, finally, the next meeting of the High Commissioner's Dialogue.
- ✚ I will group together the follow-up actions on the protection gaps issue and the application of the 10 Point Plan, as UNHCR has judged that progress in addressing the challenges and dilemmas in specific mixed movement situations on the ground –the main objective of the Ten Point Plan- will prove vital in informing the initiatives on the gaps issue.
- ✚ Accordingly, the Office has concentrated over the last several weeks on the organization of a series of field-based stakeholder conferences on the application of the 10 Point Plan in specific mixed movement situations. The conferences will be implemented with generous funding received from the European Commission. They will provide the opportunity to engage directly with affected and interested States and other stakeholders on the challenges being faced and measures to

address them. Five conferences will be held in the first instance, covering the Gulf of Aden region, West Africa, Southern Africa, Asia and the Latin American region. The first of the conferences is scheduled to take place in Sana'a in May 2008.

- ✚ In addition to this, UNHCR will then convene four expert roundtables in Geneva on different aspects of the 10 Point Plan to help refine the Plan and finalize the Good Practice Handbook which is under preparation now by the Division of International Protection Services. Furthermore, the Policy Development and Evaluation Service has been tasked to conduct a number of "lessons-learned reviews" of UNHCR's involvement in reception arrangements in mixed flow situations, beginning with Lampedusa, Italy, to be followed by similar reviews.
- ✚ All these initiatives will serve as a vehicle to craft partnership arrangements in specific situations while also informing more in-depth reflections on the gaps issue in a second stage. Let me however confirm that the specific *preliminary consultations* with IOM, ICRC, IFRC, OHCHR and the ILO, and other partners including ICVA and ICMC, that were called for at the end of the Dialogue on the gaps issue will also be held. The objective will be to frame the issues more particularly and also outline better the process itself. We expect that the consultations will take place in the second quarter of 2008. A report will be provided to States on the results of the consultations in June. Of course, they would be involved in the process itself once under way.
- ✚ Onto rescue at sea now or, more accurately, the protection and solutions issues arising in the maritime context. There are a number of actions in train that I can report on. First of all, we are putting together the next meeting of the Heads of the agencies participating in the inter-agency group on rescue at sea issues (including IOM, ILO, IMO, OCHCR and UN-DOALOS – the Division for Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea). We expect it to take place in the second half of the year. This meeting will follow the last one of the group which took place in December last year and which UNHCR reported on during the Dialogue. Its purpose will be to carry further forward the work of the December meeting, particularly on the compilation of tools on rescue at sea and an action plan to enhance inter-agency cooperation.
- ✚ At the Dialogue, we also underscored UNHCR's judgment that a Conclusion was urgently required to address comprehensively the new and pressing challenges being encountered on this matter. There have since been a number of consultations in the EXCOM framework on how to move forward on this effort. What has been agreed is that UNHCR will present a conference room paper on the protection and solutions problems which arise in the maritime context at the June Standing Committee. Thereafter, the process of considering a Conclusion will follow. In keeping with the overall manner in which it has been agreed to address the Conclusions process in the 2008 to

2009 period, it is foreseen that the Conclusion on this subject would be adopted in 2009.

Turning now to the next Dialogue, those delegates who were present at the December 2007 one will recall that the High Commissioner was very pleased with it, particularly the quality and inter-active nature of the discussions, the excellent contribution of experts, and the way in which the break-out sessions helped foster a profound examination of the issues. As did many participants, the High Commissioner appreciated the opportunity to exchange views with such a wide range of stakeholders, although the high number of participants highlighted that a balance might have to be struck between global participation on one hand and a more “tailored” one built around the specific issue under consideration. Similarly, reviewing the one and one-half days of the Dialogue, it was clear that the availability of a full two days would have provided even more time for deeper and broader discussions, especially during the initial plenary session, and also in considering the reports of the break-out sessions.

Some of these changes will be effected for the next Dialogue. The High Commissioner is proposing that this meeting takes place in late November 2008. He is also proposing the issue of protracted refugee and displacement situations as the subject for that Dialogue, not only in the camp or settlement context but, as well, in urban settings. Delegates will know that this is an issue with which the Office is strongly engaged, and interest in it is widely shared outside the Office as well. The number, scope and issues of the protracted situations with which UNHCR is seized today, the challenges they present and the Office’s strategies and requirements in dealing with them with a view to solutions will be explained by the Assistant High Commissioners in the session following the present one. The issues will be seen to be varied and complex, including protection, assistance, management and the inter-play of different frameworks and responsibilities. While the subject itself and its different implications will be pursued within the EXCOM framework of dialogue, the High Commissioner believes that the opportunity for an in-depth, free ranging debate on the subject in the Dialogue framework, benefiting from the input of experts, will be helpful in elucidating the conceptual, policy, strategic and operational intricacies involved. The Office will be communicating duly with States and other stakeholders on the exact date of the Dialogue and other relevant details.

Thank you very much Mr Chairman.