

# **UNHCR ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS 17-19 JUNE 2014 - International Conference Center Geneva**

## **REGIONAL SESSION**

### ***BACKGROUND PAPER***

#### **Asia-Pacific Regional Session** *(interpretation in English-French)*

#### **Women's Leadership and Participation in Asia and the Pacific**

***Wednesday 18 June 2014, 14:30 – 18:30 - Room 3***

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 8.4 million people of concern, including one third of the world's refugees – some 3.5 million people – and encompasses 45 countries and territories. While only 20 countries in the region have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Asia has generously hosted millions of refugees and other persons of concern for decades. States continue to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring access to asylum and protection for refugees, while working with UNCHR on sustainable solutions, particularly to protracted situations. UNHCR supports refugee status determination (RSD) in 13 of the region's 20 signatory countries, and in all non-signatory States.

The current Asia-Pacific "humanitarian" landscape includes:

- Three long-standing refugee situations: a) the Afghan refugee situation, lasting for over thirty years, with an ongoing repatriation programme and still over 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees, raising challenges in terms of host community support as well as sustainable reintegration; b) the Myanmar refugee situation, with refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia; c) and the remaining 30,000 camp-based refugees from Bhutan in Nepal (with 87,000 of them already resettled since 2007).
- Six situations of internal displacement / returns and reintegration of internally displaced persons: in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.
- Two recent emergencies, calling for inter-agency response in 2012-2014: in Myanmar, following inter-communal violence of 2012, and the Philippines, following Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013.
- Up to 1.4 million persons with no nationality or at risk of becoming stateless, including 800,000 from Myanmar's Rakhine State; progress being achieved in Central Asia and some other countries, with close to 20,000 persons obtaining citizenship since 2011; UNHCR embarking on a global fight against statelessness, aiming at eradication of the phenomenon within the next ten years including through mapping, verification exercises and campaigns for birth registration.

- Overall, a large resettlement region contributing to 47% of all resettlement departures (32,000 refugees) worldwide last year, with Nepal, Thailand and Malaysia among the top departure countries.
- Issues related to the recent surge in maritime movements across the region, and the subsequent increase in the number of asylum seekers and burden on RSD systems; efforts to foster a multilateral approach and a sharing of responsibility among States to address this, including through the establishment of standards of reception and protection, access to services and livelihood, and resettlement opportunities.

UNHCR works with its partners towards safeguarding protection and asylum space in Asia. National and regional partnerships with civil society networks are being pursued and strengthened in order to improve monitoring, access to unsafe areas, provision of legal services, community outreach in urban contexts, livelihood development, and reintegration. One example of this joint approach is the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, with a number of local and international partners, including civil society, taking part in the implementation of the strategy.

UNHCR supports the capacity-building of local NGO and government partners, as well as community-based organizations, particularly in countries with changing environments such as those enforcing new legislation or policies, or those where there was a dramatic increase in the numbers of asylum-seekers or urban refugees. Partnerships are further enhanced under the umbrella of the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on NGO-IFRC-UNHCR Partnership, an initiative to improve partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs in 2012 and beyond.

The regional session for Asia and the Pacific will look at operations in the region through the lens of this year's theme: "*Women's Leadership and Participation*". The first part of the session will be dedicated to sharing experiences on how women have contributed and can further improve the lives of refugees and other people of concern. Inspiring examples by refugee women or women from civil society will set the stage for discussions, prompting participants to envisage how to encourage more of these positive initiatives.

#### 14h30 - 16h15 Part I

Moderator, Part I: Indrani SINHA, SANLAAP

Speakers: Daisy DELL, *Director, Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR*  
 Katrina JORENE MALIAMAUV, *Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network Secretariat*

The session will start with introductory remarks by the *Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific*, highlighting the Bureau's priorities and the importance of women's leadership. A speaker from the NGO network *Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)*, *Deputy Chair* of the network's *Women and Girls at risk Working Group*, will also be invited to give the NGO perspective on "*Women's Leadership and Participation*", including examples of successful projects across Asia and the Pacific, be it through legal endeavours, self-reliance or micro-credit projects, community outreach, or solidarity programmes.

The problems and obstacles encountered by women during displacement are numerous; this is due to their vulnerability to violence, absence of status, or difficulty to fulfil their lives as mothers and breadwinners by attaining employment or livelihood, securing their family's survival and a

good education for their children. This year's session will focus on constructive experiences, putting women at the centre and highlighting their creativity, imagination, and determination to change their lives and the lives of others.

Some of the following questions may spark off the debate:

- To what extent are women's structures in camp situations positively impacting on the daily life of the community, and co-existence of refugee and host communities?
- What do women's participation and outreach activities bring to urban contexts in particular?
- What is the role of education in encouraging women and girls to be more aware of their rights, allowing them to make a positive contribution?
- How can UNHCR and civil society work together towards the eradication of discrimination and violence against women and girls?
- How can men and women work together to optimize the impact of humanitarian programs and durable solutions and interventions carried out by UNHCR and its partners?

The discussions will start with short presentations on Education by Fatemeh Ashrafi, *HAMI Executive Director* (from the Islamic Republic of Iran), and on Livelihood by Najeeba Wazefadost, Afghan refugee, *President of the Hazara Women of Australia* group. The floor will then be open for further contributions, questions and comments.

#### **16h15 – 16h45 Coffee break**

#### **16h45 – 17h30 Part I (continued)**

The session will resume with two more short presentations on community work and addressing SGBV by Rahima Khan, from *CRS Balochistan* (Pakistan) and on good practices in RSD and asylum by Brian Barbour, of the *Japan Association for Refugees*, followed by plenary debate.

#### **17h30 - 18h30 Part II**

Moderator, Part II: Julia MAYERHOFER, *Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network Secretariat*

The last hour of the session will be dedicated to an open discussion on other outstanding issues in various operations in the Asia and Pacific region and will cover a wide array of questions raised from the floor, both geographically and thematically. Lively debate will be encouraged around the issues outlined in this background paper and emerging from the discussions. The session will end with concluding remarks.