

PROGRESS REPORT ON RESETTLEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Finding durable solutions for refugees is a core function for UNHCR and a basic feature of the international system for the protection of refugees. Resettlement is one of the three main durable solutions. In recent years, the enhancement of resettlement as a tool of protection for individual refugees, as well as a durable solution for larger numbers of refugees and as a global responsibility-sharing mechanism has assumed a high priority for the Office.
2. The Programme of Action laid out in the Agenda for Protection has facilitated the process of expanding resettlement opportunities and enhancing resettlement capacities. Resettlement actions are enumerated under Goals 3 and 5 of the Agenda for Protection, dealing respectively with resettlement as a tool of burden sharing, the expansion of resettlement opportunities, and the more efficient use of resettlement both as a protection tool and as a durable solution. These goals and their associated actions have served as a framework for UNHCR's efforts to make resettlement available to a larger number of refugees.
3. The purpose of this Note is to provide a progress report on activities implemented by UNHCR in cooperation with resettlement partners. At the 21st meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2001, UNHCR presented the document "New Directions for Resettlement Policy and Practice" which laid down strategic directions and priorities for UNHCR's commitment for the following years. This progress report takes stock of the achievements since the publication of that document with a view to continuing the efforts to reinforce resettlement as an effective protection response to refugee problems and as a partnership-based approach to finding durable solutions to refugee situations.

II. RESETTLEMENT AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS STRATEGY

4. UNHCR recognizes that resettlement cannot be implemented in a vacuum. Rather, it needs to be integrated into broader protection strategies which reflect regional priorities while addressing the need to achieve durable solutions. Only through comprehensive efforts and multi-faceted programmes will resettlement attain its full capacity of being a tool of protection, of providing durable solutions and of establishing an effective mechanism for international responsibility sharing.

5. When resettlement efforts are undertaken as an essential element of a broad-based protection and durable solutions strategy, there are a number of complementary benefits to be gained, in addition to providing a solution for specific refugees. Starting from this assumption, UNHCR and its partners have developed the concept of the strategic use of resettlement which was elaborated in a discussion paper by the Working Group on Resettlement and presented at the 27th meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2003.

6. The core concept of the strategic use of resettlement is to expand protection to the greatest possible number of refugees. For instance, if used as part of a plan for comprehensive solutions, the resettlement of a number of refugees belonging to a particular group, for which it is deemed no other solutions are available, may result in the availability of alternative solutions for a larger number of refugees. Similarly, the provision of resettlement opportunities for refugees in the country of first asylum, including for *prima facie* refugee populations, may contribute to reduce secondary movements by providing the prospects of a durable solution to refugees who otherwise might resort to irregular movements, including through the use of people smugglers.

7. Resettlement countries can contribute in a substantive manner to the expansion of the strategic use of resettlement by demonstrating greater flexibility when applying resettlement criteria. The Agenda for Protection promotes this approach and encourages States to consider introducing more flexible criteria. UNHCR welcomes any effort by resettlement countries to select for resettlement refugees who are in need of international protection, but whose protection claims may not fulfill the requirements of the 1951 Convention definition. This could be particularly important where such refugees find themselves living in a precarious protection situation or where there is little or no prospect of other durable solutions. The flexible use of resettlement criteria is a fundamental aspect for the full operational development of the concept of the strategic use of resettlement, especially for its potential application in situations of mass influx when refugee groups are recognized on a *prima facie* basis.

8. Along the same conceptual lines, the Convention Plus initiative further develops the concept of the strategic use of resettlement. It views resettlement as an area of activity where multilateral agreements between States have the potential to achieve a significant impact on solving protracted refugee situations and thereby facilitate solutions for a greater number of refugees. Within the framework of the High Commissioner's Forum, first convened in June 2003 to pursue the Convention Plus initiative, the Core Group on Resettlement is finalizing a document called "Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement" containing the essential elements of Convention Plus agreements on resettlement.

III. MANAGING AND PLANNING RESETTLEMENT MORE EFFICIENTLY

9. UNHCR has furthered the process of integrating resettlement into the protection strategies of its country offices, including resettlement strategic analysis and planning tools into the offices' country operations plans. This development provides analytical and planning information from field offices on resettlement needs and on the local capacity to process refugees for resettlement.

10. On the basis of the inputs from the field, a planning document, the Projected Global Resettlement Needs, is prepared annually in June to cover the following year. This allows a period of several months for UNHCR and resettlement countries to discuss and organize the levels and scope of the national resettlement programmes in a coordinated and cooperative manner. In June 2004, for the first time, an "Indications Conference" is being organized by UNHCR and resettlement countries to discuss the resettlement needs and quotas with respect to particular refugee caseloads.

11. At the same time, measures have been taken to strengthen the overall management of resettlement within UNHCR through the establishment of a coordinating body, the Resettlement Management Working Group, which includes the regional bureaux, to advise and support the work of the Resettlement Section. Statistical reporting tools were improved and standardized in an effort to achieve a rapid and accurate global monitoring of resettlement trends and projections.

12. In 2003 UNHCR formally established two regional resettlement hubs in Africa, in Accra and Nairobi respectively. The hubs have been progressively consolidated and have contributed substantially to strengthen and coordinate resettlement activities and to improve the quality of resettlement submissions in the regions they cover.

IV. ENHANCING RESETTLEMENT AS A DURABLE SOLUTION

13. The plight of large numbers of refugees caught up in protracted situations in camps and urban settings, and the absence of timely solutions for their problems, remain issues of particular concern to UNHCR. UNHCR has been intensifying its efforts to make solutions more readily available. These efforts have included the expansion of resettlement opportunities, including through the establishment of a methodology for the resettlement of refugee groups.

14. The methodology for the identification and profiling of refugee groups to be considered for resettlement complements the work done by the Working Group on Resettlement on the strategic use of resettlement. This practical tool has assisted UNHCR offices in a number of countries in Africa to identify potential refugee groups for whom resettlement is the most appropriate durable solution. Resettlement countries and other resettlement partners have welcomed the group methodology and participated in several joint assessment missions to field locations where refugee populations have been identified for possible resettlement.

15. As a result, a number of groups of refugees were submitted by UNHCR to resettlement countries. Recently a group of Somali Benadir totalling 2500 refugees, who are residing in Dadaab, Kenya, and a second group of some 2500 particularly vulnerable Liberian female refugee heads of household currently residing in Laine camp, Guinea, were submitted for resettlement. The challenge in 2004 is to structure and manage the use of resettlement in the context of large repatriation operations in a number of sub-regions in Africa.

V. ENLARGING THE POOL OF RESETTLEMENT COUNTRIES

16. UNHCR has continued to assist emerging resettlement countries to consolidate their programmes and to develop appropriate procedures for the selection of the refugees from among the populations identified for resettlement. Similarly, support is being provided to enhance the capacity of new resettlement countries in the reception and integration of resettled refugees. Resettlement programmes are being consolidated in Brazil and Chile. For instance, UNHCR facilitated a twinning programme between Sweden and Brazil on capacity building for a Brazilian government official involved in selection missions. The programme resulted in a number of Colombian refugees being selected for resettlement to Brazil.

17. Within the European context, UNHCR participates in the debate on possibilities for developing a European Union resettlement programme. Resettlement must be seen as a complement not a substitute for national asylum policies, as well as an indispensable tool for comprehensive solutions. The region is witnessing successful new resettlement programmes in countries such as Ireland, Iceland and the United Kingdom, the lessons of which are providing useful inputs to the European debate on resettlement

18. On the African continent, the resettlement programmes in Benin and Burkina Faso have undergone a detailed evaluation commissioned by UNHCR. The aim is, *inter alia*, to analyse the experience of resettlement programmes in developing countries, as well as to address some of the problems encountered in achieving the integration of the resettled refugees. The evaluation proposes wide-ranging recommendations, directed not least at making resettlement efforts more integrally linked to developmental efforts, which would ensure the sustainability of the resettlement programmes.

VI. THE RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF RESETTLED REFUGEES

19. Integration of resettled refugees is the last step of the *continuum* in the resettlement process. Naturally, resettlement countries are responsible for all the activities and the resources necessary for the successful integration of resettled refugees. However, since the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement of 1999, UNHCR and its resettlement partners have contributed to these efforts by promoting the exchange of ideas and practices on refugee resettlement among the traditional and the emerging resettlement countries. This resulted in the organization of the *International Conference on the Reception and the Integration of Resettled Refugees* that took place in Sweden on 25-27 April 2001. The Conference endorsed 15 general principles that should serve as a guide to resettlement countries and NGOs to promote refugee integration. The manual "Refugee Resettlement: an International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration" was compiled by NGOs and published by UNHCR as the reference text on the principles endorsed by the Conference and as a guidance to States for the integration of resettled refugees.

20. The work on the integration of resettled refugees is continuing through a project implemented by the Canadian Council for Refugees. The project is titled "Next Steps in Supporting Integration Initiatives Project" and includes the compilation of a Survey of Needs and Opportunities which will identify suitable ways to assist the development of new resettlement programmes. The project will also include a research on various models of

twinning that may be applicable within the tripartite partnership activities on integration. UNHCR is part of the Advisory Committee to the Project.

VII. REINFORCING RESETTLEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

21. Resettlement is a labour-intensive activity which requires constant support in terms of staff and resources in order to be efficient and effective. Competing needs and resource constraints risk hampering programme delivery and limiting UNHCR's capacity to attend to refugees with protection and resettlement needs. Close collaboration with governmental and NGO partners is therefore a critical element of any resettlement effort.

22. In recent years, tripartite mechanisms were created to foster dialogue and operational coordination among the resettlement partners. Representing a specific element of this partnership, the Working Group on Resettlement, established in the mid-90s to foster and enhance the common efforts on resettlement, has continued to provide the forum for debate on resettlement needs, operational and policy issues and strategies to improve the overall resettlement output. It is a consultative body composed of resettlement countries, UNHCR, the European Commission and IOM which meets three times per year. In addition, every year in June, the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement are convened by the Chair of the Working Group. This forum includes NGO partners and allows for a more field-oriented discussion on the operational needs and response in the field.

23. UNHCR supports the greater involvement of NGOs and international organizations in the implementation of resettlement programmes. Given their specific areas of expertise and knowledge of refugee populations, NGOs are particularly well placed to make an important contribution to the identification and processing of vulnerable cases and individual refugees facing protection problems as well as to the processing of groups.

24. However, a core element of the partnership with NGOs should remain the leading role of UNHCR in the resettlement process. As the internationally mandated organization for seeking solutions to refugee problems, UNHCR must maintain the responsibility for analysing the protection context and identifying the most suitable solutions to refugee problems. Without well-coordinated partnerships and detailed operational procedures, it would be more difficult to prevent fraud and malfeasance, to ensure a consistent application of resettlement criteria and to ensure that refugees' expectations do not result in protection problems in the field. UNHCR believes that the preferred and most effective partnership model for a greater involvement of NGOs and other international organizations in resettlement operations is one where the UNHCR country office coordinates the operations, including the referral of submissions to resettlement countries.

25. Partnerships with NGOs in resettlement operations are achieved partly through the deployment of NGO personnel to UNHCR field operations. The UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme is a practical application of such a partnership. It aims at increasing UNHCR's capacity to carry out resettlement activities in the field particularly as regards case work and submissions to resettlement countries. In 2003, through the Scheme, 42 persons, mainly qualified personnel from NGOs have contributed to achieving the resettlement targets in the field. They were deployed in 23 different countries, mainly in Africa. The success of this

initiative is linked to the continuation of support by resettlement countries that provide the bulk of the necessary funds for the continuation of the programme.

VIII. A MORE TRANSPARENT AND RELIABLE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

26. Uncertainty about the future and precarious living conditions place a heavy burden on refugees and their families, especially when solutions seem to be out of sight and reach. These conditions make refugees vulnerable to extortion and fraud. The resettlement process has suffered in the past from fraud and corruption and, due to its very nature, will continue to be an activity with a high risk of malpractice.

27. Important progress has been achieved in the area of making resettlement a more reliable and transparent process. UNHCR's procedures for the identification, selection and processing of potential resettlement cases have been revised and the related chapters of the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook have been updated accordingly.

28. UNHCR field offices have adopted standard operating procedures for the resettlement process that delineate the accountability framework within which resettlement is undertaken and designate responsible officers for each phase of the process.

29. In an effort to enhance the capacity of field staff to perform resettlement according to standards of quality and reliability, training programmes were created and implemented in all regions in 2003. The Refugee Status Determination-Resettlement (RSD-RS) Learning Programme was launched with three intakes, two of which were in Africa and the third of which covered Central Asia and Eastern Europe. In addition to the Learning Programmes, three regional workshops on resettlement policy and practice were organized covering the regions of Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. Dedicated sessions of the training programmes were devoted to the management of the resettlement process and to issues of fraud prevention and awareness. A total of 136 field staff benefited from these training programmes during the year. In 2004 an advanced train-the-trainer programme is being organized for staff who graduated from the RSD-RS Learning Programme in order to facilitate the replication of training initiatives at the field level.

30. In order to further advance the Office's preparedness to prevent and combat fraud in the resettlement process, UNHCR has recently engaged a consultant to formulate an action plan to strengthen field offices' capacity to manage and prevent the risks of fraud and malfeasance. Monitoring must also be enhanced to ensure operational improvements in resettlement are maintained, as effective management is a strong counter to all types of fraud. The work of the consultant will link up with that of the Office of the Inspector General in the formulation of preventive strategies and implementation tools, including raising the awareness of staff, implementing partners and refugees to the risks and consequences of fraud.

IX. THE NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT OF RESETTLEMENT OPERATIONS

31. The impact of the security responses following the attacks of September 2001 has caused great disruption to the resettlement of refugees. States have stepped up their security apparatus, and applied more stringent checks on foreigners entering their countries. Refugees are affected by this development and many have remained for very long periods on waiting lists, pending clearance for their travel. Security checks have become lengthy and cumbersome, especially with regard to refugees with specific national or personal profiles considered by resettlement countries to be of particular risk.

32. The impact of this security environment on the resettlement of refugees is demonstrated by statistical evidence: while 33,098 UNHCR-assisted resettlement departures took place in 2001, only 21,037 refugees departed in 2002, a reduction of 36 per cent compared to the previous year. However, in 2003, the trend has moved upwards again, due to the renewed efforts by UNHCR and its partners to revitalize resettlement as a durable solution. A total of 28,255 refugees departed for resettlement in 2003, which represents an increase of 34 per cent compared to the 2002 figures.

33. Other obstacles to the travel of resettled refugees include restrictive health checks and delays in the provision of travel documents. UNHCR encourages resettlement countries to facilitate the travel of resettling refugees by using, when appropriate, specific waivers or by lifting the general provisions which would normally apply across the board.

X. THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

34. The enhancement of the global resettlement capacity parallels the opening of new possibilities for comprehensive solutions to protracted refugees situations in Asia and in Africa. Similarly, the possible resettlement of specific refugee caseloads increases the options for alternative solutions, including local integration in the asylum countries, thus reinforcing the national system of refugee protection.

35. The challenge facing UNHCR is to ensure the sustainability of progress made in strengthening the Office's capacity for an enhanced and systematic use of resettlement. In 2003 UNHCR received additional funding for resettlement activities that considerably facilitated the implementation of UNHCR's resettlement programmes. Additional funding for resettlement activities has been received for the year 2004 as well. While UNHCR has been able to mainstream a few of the positions created through these additional funds, the necessary resources to maintain the programmes at the level reached with the additional funding, are not being made available through the regular Annual Budget in 2004. This is a serious problem for the sustainability of the programmes.

36. Important progress in the resettlement of refugees has been achieved by UNHCR and its partners since the publication of the document "New Directions for Resettlement Policy and Practice" on 14 June 2001. The strategic use of resettlement and new operational methodologies such as group identification and processing are contributing to complement resettlement's traditional function of being a protection response with a more comprehensive and far-reaching vision of resettlement both as a tool of protection and a durable solution. Protracted refugee

situations can be addressed and potentially resolved through the strategic use of resettlement and enhanced international responsibility sharing.

37. The new directions envisaged in 2001 and implemented since then have been vital for the continuing efforts by UNHCR and the international community to provide protection to refugees and to seek durable solutions to their plight. It is now important to maintain the renewed focus on enhancing resettlement and to follow up on the initiatives that have been started. In that regard UNHCR is endeavouring to mainstream resettlement as a central protection element and as a component of strategies for comprehensive solutions, and to ensure adequate resources for resettlement activities. Resettlement countries are encouraged to support these efforts by providing necessary resources, applying flexible criteria for the selection of refugees for resettlement and by supporting a cooperative and coordinated approach to planning and implementing resettlement programmes. NGOs should continue to play a vital role in support of UNHCR's programmes and contribute their expertise and field resources in an expanded role in the resettlement process. Together the resettlement partners can move the resettlement agenda forward.