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High Commissioner’s Programme**

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**Update on UNHCR’s operations in Asia and the Pacific -
2011**

A. Introduction – critical challenges

Mixed migration

Asia’s complex mixed migration scenarios include movements of refugees and other persons of concern with specific protection needs, as well as others who move for non-protection-related reasons. Ensuring protection within the broader context of irregular movements of people continues to be a challenge. In 2010, UNHCR took concrete steps to support Governments in this respect, notably through the development of a regional cooperation framework in South-East Asia, under the Bali Process.

Urban refugees/asylum-seekers

Many of UNHCR’s beneficiaries in Asia reside in urban centres. Amongst the most critical issues facing the Office are how to identify and reach out to persons of concern in urban situations and how to provide protection in the face of the increasing use of detention of asylum-seekers, particularly in South-East Asia.

UNHCR’s urban refugee policy has been put into practice to various degrees in many cities in Asia since September 2009. Challenges encountered include: improving identification and registration; mobilizing community outreach; effectively addressing sexual and gender-based violence; establishing new or innovative partnerships; improving livelihoods and self-reliance; and seeking durable solutions.

Protracted refugee situations

Today, the Asia-Pacific region is hosting more than 3.5 million refugees, many of whom are in situations of protracted displacement. Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran currently host 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees, including some who have been there for over 30 years, constituting one of the largest protracted refugee populations in the world; and UNHCR’s refugee operations in Bangladesh and Nepal, and along the Thai/Myanmar border, are now over 20 years old.

Internal displacement

In 2010, UNHCR was called upon to be involved in two critical, and logistically challenging, emergencies which occurred in the Asia region: one following a conflict situation and the other a natural disaster.

In Central Asia, UNHCR successfully mobilized a timely emergency response in a highly complex political and security environment in June 2010, following the conflict-induced displacement of an estimated 300,000 people inside southern Kyrgyzstan, in addition to some 75,000 who fled across the border into Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, together with partners, the Office constructed some 1300 emergency transitional shelters. This emergency shelter programme provided more than 13,400 returnees with durable, safe and warm two-room shelters before the onset of winter, on their own private lots, facilitating their return to their places of origin.

The floods in Pakistan had a devastating impact on over 20 million people, including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had already been displaced by previous hostilities, and Pakistani communities themselves. The sheer magnitude of the emergency together with its vast geographical coverage stretched national and international capacities and resources to the limit. With its expertise and experience, the Office was able to make a significant contribution to the international efforts to support the Government of Pakistan in responding to this disaster. Support was mobilized on an unprecedented scale, in close collaboration with State authorities and with strong backing from donors, in order to deliver assistance to persons affected by the floods. Lessons learned from this involvement will help to shape discussions with ExCom members and with other humanitarian partners and to provide guidance on the potential role of the Office in future natural disaster situations.

Statelessness

Asia has a low rate of accession to the two statelessness Conventions, with only two States being party to both.

UNHCR is advocating for all countries in the region to accede to international instruments which protect the rights of stateless persons; to amend national laws contradicting these instruments; to pursue national efforts to document stateless persons and reduce statelessness; and to encourage the exchange of good practices in this area.

B. Analysis of challenges and response strategies

Mixed migration

With tremendous disparities in income and living standards, the movement of people remains a defining feature of the Asian region. Asylum-seekers fleeing persecution or conflict are on the move, alongside migrants. Many Governments in the region do not distinguish between refugees and asylum-seekers and illegal migrants, and fear that establishing formal asylum procedures would lead to a major “pull” factor. Even in countries which do have a national legal framework, many lack the necessary resources to establish national institutions to deal specifically with refugee issues. With the exception of a few countries, most States rely primarily on UNHCR to determine refugee status, assist refugees, and identify durable solutions for them. Safeguarding protection and asylum space in this context continues to be a challenge in an environment where States’ concerns about national security and bilateral relations tend to take priority over refugee protection.

UNHCR is actively engaged in the “Bali Process”, and has developed a regional cooperation framework which was endorsed at a workshop on Regional Cooperation on Refugees and Irregular Movements held in Manila in November 2010. Key concerned countries have recognized that these issues cannot be resolved in isolation, and that cooperative multilateral and regional approaches are required in order to address divergences in State practices. The Manila meeting served as a first step towards achieving better burden and responsibility sharing across the affected countries in the region.

The recommendations of a Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in Central Asia, to be held in mid-March, will influence UNHCR's strategy to strengthen asylum space in Central Asia in 2011. A key objective of this Conference is to develop an implementation strategy for the 10-Point Plan of Action in Central Asia, with a view to establishing a protection-sensitive entry system.

Urban refugees

A prerequisite for the effective implementation of UNHCR's urban refugee policy in Asia is to increase protection capacity and resources, and build broader partnerships. The aim is to invest greater resources in well-planned and sustainable interventions and integrate refugee needs into existing national structures and services to the extent possible.

In 2011, UNHCR offices in Asia will focus on examining current gaps in the protection of urban refugees and devise strategies that will include facilitating self-reliance arrangements. A key component is to forge new, creative partnerships to strengthen coping mechanisms and identify best practices for community outreach and support.

Protracted refugee situations

UNHCR will continue to promote community-based approaches to improve the services available in refugee-hosting communities and ensure refugees' access to those services, and to encourage peaceful co-existence between refugees and their hosts, pending a durable solution.

The Government of Pakistan's comprehensive Management and Repatriation Strategy for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan represents a major step towards addressing the protection and durable solution needs of Afghan refugees. The strategy puts renewed focus on finding durable solutions as well as exploring migration alternatives and various visa regimes and documentation options. It includes: the extension of the Tripartite Agreement and the Proof of Registration (POR) card system for 1.7 million Afghan refugees until the end of 2012; a population profiling exercise for the Afghan refugee population, with an emphasis on protection; and the continuation of the Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) programme.

UNHCR will work to harness a "core group" of donor countries and the United Nations Country Team with a view to coordinating international funding initiatives in support of the Islamic Republic of Iran's ongoing assistance to refugees. It is also foreseen that this could include a programme to provide development assistance to refugee-hosting communities similar to the RAHA initiative in Pakistan.

On 20 December 2010, the Government of Nepal formally approved the "Detailed Project Proposal on Camp Consolidation and Community Development in Refugee Hosting and Impacted Areas." This is an important step in the camp consolidation process now that substantial numbers of refugees have been resettled (over 41,000 refugees from Bhutan have departed since the launch of the resettlement programme in November 2007).

Internal displacement

Major IDP situations in Asia will continue to receive attention. While over 2 million Pakistani IDPs have returned home since 2009, there are still close to 1 million persons displaced, and new displacement has taken place in the north-western part of the country. UNHCR will continue to work through the cluster approach and have preparedness measures in place to respond quickly to possible new displacement. In Kyrgyzstan in 2011, UNHCR will focus on post-emergency confidence-building measures and, while peace and stability in southern Kyrgyzstan remain fragile, will continue to assure adequate preparedness arrangements.

Over 200,000 IDPs in Sri Lanka have been able to return home with the Office's assistance in the past year. While a number of IDPs who have been in displacement for many years still require a durable solution, UNHCR is focusing its efforts on assisting and supporting the return of increasing numbers of refugees.

Following the launch of the operation in the Philippines for the benefit of IDPs in Mindanao, in 2011 the Office will strengthen its operational engagement in leading the protection cluster for this population.

Natural disaster response

UNHCR will aim for a successful conclusion of the flood emergency response phase of its engagement in Pakistan. In Pakistan, The Office will consolidate its flood response activities in 2011 and will target interventions in protection and shelter, for which the Office is cluster lead under the inter-agency process.

UNHCR believes that its involvement in humanitarian situations caused by natural disasters and the proposed extension of the Office's protection support to Governments in such situations, would not only help national and international emergency response efforts, but could also generate synergies that would strengthen asylum space and improve refugee protection. UNHCR's strategy for the Asia and Pacific region with regard to natural disaster response would be to focus on strengthening protection capacity and partnerships at the country and regional levels in support of Governments' national natural disaster response mechanisms.

Statelessness

In October 2010, UNHCR and the Thailand National Human Rights Commission co-hosted a Regional Expert Roundtable on Good Practices for the Identification, Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and the Protection of Stateless Persons in South-East Asia. More than 60 human rights experts from across South-East Asia discussed good practices in ASEAN countries for the identification, prevention and reduction of statelessness, as well as for the protection of stateless persons. A number of existing frameworks and synergies, at both national and regional levels, were identified that could help develop a comprehensive response to statelessness, and UNHCR looks forward to providing its technical support and expertise in this regard. It is encouraging that the ASEAN Intergovernmental Human Rights Commission members have become particularly interested in addressing the issue of statelessness.

In Turkmenistan, the Government has agreed to implement an Action Plan for joint activities on the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness in the country. Building on this initiative, UNHCR will pursue its efforts to engage countries in Central Asia to accede to international instruments protecting the rights of stateless persons. Country-specific action plans are being prepared in line with a comprehensive regional strategy for the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

C. Financial information

The budget of US\$ 427 million for Asia and the Pacific for 2011, as presented in the Global Appeal 2011 Update, remains valid for the majority of operations. However, for a few operations, the budget may have to be reviewed and increased for new unmet needs and priorities identified since the approval of the budget by the Executive Committee in October 2010.