



Central African refugees prepare to relocate from temporary shelters in Gbiti transit site, to Mbiile refugee camp, Cameroon.

# *Preserving life,*

by **António Guterres**

UNITED NATIONS  
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

**A**s 2014 draws to a close, we look back at a dark year. Several new crises erupted on different continents, old conflicts continued to fester, and there were innumerable instances of serious human rights violations. As a result, thousands of people around the world were forced to flee their homes every day. Already at the end of 2013, global forced displacement had taken on a magnitude not seen since the end of the Second World War, with 51.2 million people worldwide displaced due to conflict and persecution. If current trends continue, the end-2014 figure is likely to be even higher. And as every new crisis adds to the pressure on humanitarian access, funding and response capacity, the limits of what we can do have become painfully obvious. These challenges will clearly continue as we prepare for 2015, and some fundamental changes will be required to allow humanitarian actors to go on preserving life amidst turmoil.



# amidst turmoil

UNHCR / F. NOY

In the second half of 2014, the international humanitarian system has been responding to four simultaneous large-scale L-3 emergencies in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria). Over 5.5 million people were displaced by events in these four countries during 2014 alone, and other crises – in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Ukraine and elsewhere – forced hundreds of thousands more to flee.

In all of these situations, insecurity has hindered humanitarian response and access to people of concern. The loss of 81 humanitarian workers, killed in the line of duty during the first nine months of 2014, illustrates how important it is for us to continue to invest strongly in staff safety measures and security management. UNHCR's staff are its greatest resource, and ensuring their security, well-being and development, is an absolute corporate priority.

Our response in the highly challenging global environment of 2014 was bolstered by three central pillars of support for refugee protection. Host countries and communities continued to receive people fleeing for safety, often at a high cost to their own economies and societies. UNHCR's donors maintained and even increased their commitment to our work, providing some 3 billion dollars in 2014, more than triple the funding received ten years ago. And UNHCR operations across the globe, as well as advocacy, policy making and the development of new tools and guidance, were strengthened by the exemplary collaboration of our partners.

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE

This pressure on resources and capacities has highlighted the need for further improvements in existing emergency response mechanisms; thus ensuring speedy and effective delivery in new displacement crises continues to be a

defining priority for our work. Measures to be taken in 2015 include the strengthening of global stockpiles and cash-assistance mechanisms; a review of internal emergency protocols; and continued investment in training, technical support for key sectors, and standby partnerships. In addition, UNHCR will continue to invest in solid cluster leadership capacity for internal displacement situations, and will further enhance its support to the three clusters it leads or co-leads at the global level (for protection, shelter, and camp management and camp coordination). Sustained efforts to reform UNHCR's human resource management are also required, so as to ensure the organization will have the workforce needed for continued response in the mid-to-longer term.

#### **PARTNERSHIP**

Partnership is central to emergency response, and indeed to all of UNHCR's work. In 2015, we will maintain our focus on strengthening collaboration with other operational UN agencies, notably WFP and UNICEF, and on supporting the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Transformative Agenda and its field implementation. Together with our main IASC partners, we will also continue the roll-out of the Refugee Coordination Model to strengthen our inclusive, integral and distinct role, and to further clarify roles and responsibilities. Our collaboration with non-governmental organizations will focus on partnership support missions to facilitate field-level dialogue and continued strengthening of key bilateral relationships to identify synergies and common priorities for advocacy.

UNHCR will also continue to invest significantly in partnerships with development actors, to help us facilitate durable solutions for refugees and other people of concern, and to ensure greater complementarity of humanitarian and development actions from the beginning of displacement. Our close collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank in the context of the Syria situation aims at stabilizing the situation and building longer-term resilience amongst host communities and refugees. This ground-breaking approach underpins the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan

(3RP) with over 150 partners and the Governments of the host countries.

#### **PROTECTION**

UNHCR's protection focus in 2015 will continue to be on reinvigorating and reaffirming the centrality of protection in all aspects of humanitarian response – from the outset of an emergency and throughout displacement. In addition, we will work on a number of global protection priorities, including statelessness, protection at sea, the protection of women and children, and the implementation of the recently issued Beyond Detention strategy.

In November 2014, UNHCR will have launched its global Campaign to End Statelessness within the next decade. With more accessions to the 1961 Convention in the last four years than in the four decades following its adoption, and with an increasing number of States following through on the statelessness-related pledges they made at the 2011 Ministerial meeting, there is now sufficient global momentum to put the goal of ending statelessness firmly within reach. 2015 will be the first year of implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, developed in close cooperation with States, civil society and international organizations to resolve existing situations, prevent new cases and better identify and protect stateless people.

Recent years have seen a sharp increase in irregular maritime movements and in the number of deaths at sea, be it in the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Aden, the Caribbean or in South-East Asia. Against this background, UNHCR launched its Global Initiative on Protection at Sea in 2014 to support States in efforts to reduce the loss of life and establish protection-sensitive responses to irregular mixed migration by sea. The 2014 Protection Dialogue that I will convene in December focuses on the same topic. It will provide a forum to jointly explore the challenges related to irregular maritime movements and identify ways to support States in improving rescue and disembarkation; ensuring proper reception conditions; providing fair treatment of protection claims; and, most importantly, enhancing regional cooperation and burden sharing.



The High Commissioner chats with Syrian refugees at their family shelter in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.

UNHCR / A. MCCONNELL

Another corporate priority for UNHCR's protection response in 2015 will continue to be the protection of women and children. This will include strong support to country operations in the response to and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as well as several training programmes. And as one in two refugees worldwide is now under 18 years of age, child protection interventions will be further enhanced to guide country operations in protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse, forced recruitment, child labour, early marriage and other harmful practices to which they are exposed as a result of their displacement. Birth registration, access to quality education, psychosocial support and an increased focus on adolescents and youth will be pillars of UNHCR's response in this area.

Finally, 2015 will see a strong focus on the implementation of the Beyond Detention strategy (2014-2019), in partnership with the International Detention Coalition and other partners. At a time when putting people in detention has become a routine feature, rather than an exception, in the way many States deal with the irregular entry of asylum-seekers, the strategy aims at supporting governments in addressing these challenges, through alternatives that are both more effective and more supportive of human dignity and the respect for human rights.

#### DURABLE SOLUTIONS AND SELF-RELIANCE

After more than a decade of shrinking refugee figures, new cross-border displacement has now been outpacing durable solutions for four consecutive years, and today, over 6 million refugees worldwide live in protracted situations of exile. Giving more refugees access to opportunities for rebuilding their lives will continue to require a strong institutional focus, enhanced partnerships and sustained investments in actions to help prepare the path towards lasting solutions – including skills training, sustainable livelihoods and an initiative to work with States on simplifying resettlement procedures.

Comprehensive approaches hold the most potential for resolving long-standing refugee situations, and UNHCR will continue to provide strong support to a number of strategies, such as those being pursued for Afghan refugees in South-West Asia, Angolans, Rwandans and Liberians, or for Colombian refugees in Ecuador. 2015 will also see continued support for the recently created Solutions Alliance, which brings together UN agencies and civil society, host and donor governments, as well as academic and private sector actors to help promote collective, strategic approaches to the development of durable solutions from the beginning of displacement. Local chapters of the Solutions

Alliance will continue their work in Zambia and Somalia, including as part of the Global Initiative for Somali Refugees.

Here too, partnerships are essential and UNHCR will work closely with governments, UN agencies, NGO partners and other stakeholders to advance opportunities for durable solutions as well as promote sustainable market-based livelihoods programmes under its four-year global strategy.

Where solutions are not immediately available, UNHCR will continue to support self-reliance and mobility, which allow displaced people to make positive contributions to their host communities. In this context, we will begin implementation of our recently issued policy on alternatives to camps in 2015, together with host governments and a wide range of partners. The policy, which extends the principal objectives of the urban refugee policy to all operational contexts, should be a useful tool in achieving improved outcomes for refugees and countries of asylum alike.

#### RETHINKING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The exponential increase in humanitarian needs we have witnessed in recent years is unlikely to subside in the near future. A weak international capacity for preventing and resolving conflict most likely means that there will continue to be a multitude of new and protracted crises which force people from their homes. In addition, a combination of urbanization, population growth, food insecurity and water scarcity, poverty and economic inequality – all exacerbated by the effects of climate change – only add to the probability of further increases in forced displacement. This clearly puts into question the adequacy and sustainability of the resources available for humanitarian response.

If we want to ensure the international humanitarian system is equipped to face present and future challenges, a number of changes must be envisaged. One of them concerns funding. Ongoing efforts to expand the existing donor base must be taken further, and creative options for bolstering humanitarian funding considered, such as the possibility of creating an emergency

response fund for large-scale crises. In addition, the existing relationship between humanitarian and development funding must be reviewed. Without more complementarity, and more early action by development actors, humanitarian resources will continue to be stretched beyond their limits to cover needs that should be addressed by development assistance budgets (which stand at over eight times the amount of global humanitarian funding). Nearly two decades after “bridging the gap” first emerged as a slogan, much work remains to be done to ensure that this concept grows from a motto into an operational reality.

Apart from financing, rethinking humanitarian response also requires us to adapt to changing realities. For this reason, UNHCR will put even more emphasis on innovation in 2015 – for example by increasing the use of cash and vouchers, making outreach, registration and assistance more effective through modern technology, or promoting safe fuel and energy sources.

#### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

2015 is likely to be a year of continued humanitarian challenges and pressures, but it will also bring opportunities. These include some of the initiatives for international collaboration in the areas covered by UNHCR’s protection mandate, as well as an opening to shape the future of sustainable development and humanitarian response. UNHCR will continue to play a central role in advocacy efforts to mainstream durable solutions for forced displacement into the post-2015 development agenda, and in the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit scheduled to take place in Istanbul in mid-2016.

As we approach the end of 2014, a year that has brought into sharp focus the limits of humanitarian response, there is a clear call for the root causes of displacement and human suffering to be addressed. Ultimately, this requires a stronger international capacity to prevent and resolve crises; and fundamentally, it is a question of political will for the international community to truly come together and resolve its differences and contradictions. ■



UNHCR / R. ARNOLD

The Special Envoy meets Karenni refugee Baw Meh, 75, from Myanmar, in Ban Mai Nai Soi camp, Thailand.

## Special Envoy

With 14 years of service with UNHCR, Special Envoy Angelina Jolie continues to add her voice to the High Commissioner's advocacy for better protection, assistance and solutions for refugees, in particular in complex situations such as the ongoing Syria emergency.

Following an earlier trip to Lebanon where she met with Syrian refugees, the Special Envoy spent World Refugee Day 2014 with Myanmar refugees in northern Thailand. She was moved by their resilience after three decades in exile and called for greater support to equip them with the skills and education that will help them embrace their future and to help Myanmar prepare

for safe and sustainable returns when conditions are conducive.

The Special Envoy continues to voice her concern over the impact of the deepening crisis in Syria and its spillover into the region: "Together, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have become clear threats to the stability of the region, affecting global peace and security."

The Special Envoy also accompanied the High Commissioner later in the year on a visit to Malta, where they warned about the scale of the crisis in the Mediterranean and called for increased efforts by European nations to contribute to the rescue of irregular migrants in peril on the high seas. ■

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There is a direct link between the conflicts in Syria and elsewhere and the rise in deaths at sea in the Mediterranean. We have to understand what drives people to take the fearful step of risking their children's lives on crowded, unsafe vessels; it is the overwhelming desire to find refuge.

—Special Envoy Angelina Jolie

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