

Item 3 (b)

**66th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Programme/Protection policy: Youth
(22 June 2016)
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Excellences, Honorable Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to present the first ever Conference Room Paper on the topic of Youth.

In years past, briefings to the Standing Committee highlighted the issues of Children at Risk, Women and Girls, Education and the link between Education and Child Protection. But as I brief you on our recent work, you'll see that, in some ways, this year is the "year of youth" at UNHCR.

You may recall, this time last year, an update on the particular challenges stateless children and youth face, the result of interviews with stateless youth on all continents and captured in the report, "I am here, I belong: the urgent need to end childhood statelessness".

Learning from this rich experience, UNHCR has strengthened its work to reach out to young refugees, to encourage them to develop and implement projects, borne of their own initiative, to address protection challenges they have identified within their own communities. We wanted to highlight the positive difference young people can and do bring to their communities and how they contribute to their own protection, well-being and solutions. This has been highlighted through the Global Refugee Youth Consultations and in last week's youth-themed Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations – photos of which you see displayed on the screen behind me. And 2016 has also seen UNHCR's endorsement of the Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action launched at the World Humanitarian Summit

(, and the consideration of a first ever Executive Committee Conclusion on Youth.)

Young refugees, stateless and internally displaced people have inspired all of us in so many ways but I'll limit my presentation today three main areas:

1. The specific needs and capacities of refugee, internally displaced and stateless youth;
2. Key Areas of Progress in terms of the actions that we've taken to follow-up on the recommendations of a 2013 Review of UNHCR's Engagement with Displaced Youth; and
3. UNHCR's new approach to engaging more effectively with refugee, internally displaced and stateless youth as true partners in protection and programming responses.

I. Needs and capacities of refugee, internally displaced and stateless youth

Conflict and forced displacement frequently compel young people to take on new roles or responsibilities beyond their years to try to meet their own and their families' basic needs. For youth living in displacement, asylum, and living without a recognized nationality, an increased sense of marginalization and a perceived lack of prospects for the future can have a real impact on their well-being and heighten protection risks. Feelings of not being able to take charge of one's life can lead to adopting harmful coping strategies, such as transactional sex, child

marriage, or become vulnerable to recruitment into criminal or armed groups, and exploitation in the labor market.

Coming from situations of conflict or living on the margins of society, young displaced or stateless persons can be emotionally and psychologically marked by their experiences, particularly during a crucial transformative time in their cognitive and physiological development. They often have little or no opportunity to engage in constructive activities and have few education or employment opportunities.

For many years, humanitarian response has focused on children, ensuring that they have access to primary education and specific programs. This drive has been largely successful, even if much more needs to be done to include all children. But we recognize the absence of targeted, age-appropriate services and programs accompanying boys and girls into the transitional phase of adolescence and youth.

Adolescent girls are often the least able to access any programs because of challenging social norms and traditional practices which may leave them confined to their homes, required to work or obliged to marry at a too young age. Adolescent boys and young men can often be forgotten in programmatic and strategic responses, as they are understood, stereotypically, as “problems” that must be addressed rather than as agents of positive change with whom to actively engage.

As you know, stateless youth find themselves at heightened risk. Unable to prove their legal identity, stateless young people are often denied the right to quality education, progress to tertiary education or access vocational training, enter the formal labor market. Our report on stateless children and youth last year concluded that their lack of nationality often sentences them and their families to a life of impoverishment and of marginalization, repeated over generations.

Similar issues came to light during this year’s Global Refugee Youth Consultations: a lack of personal documentation, a failure to recognize school certificates and lengthy complex asylum procedures leave scores of young people in a kind of limbo – a holding pattern - at a time in life and development when they yearn to become independent, to develop their skills and reach their full potential as productive members of society.

Having to overcome the trauma of becoming separated from family or of having witnessed incredible acts of violence, and in the face of such adversity like discrimination and poverty, young people demonstrate great resilience when given the opportunity to develop their talents and skills. During the Global Refugee Youth Consultations here in Geneva last week, we heard from young refugees who completed university degrees, set up their own NGOs, acted as mentors for others in their community, and youth from refugee hosting communities who became ambassadors of peace, tolerance and resilience.

Key Areas of Progress

In 2013, UNHCR conducted a global review of “UNHCR’s engagement with displaced youth”. Since then, I am pleased to report, UNHCR has focused on strengthening measures to support young people, in line with the recommendations of the review. This has included the appointment of dedicated staff working on youth issues, advocacy within the Organization and together with others like the inter-agency Youth and Adolescents in Emergencies Advocacy Group, and we’ve helped develop the Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian

Action launched recently at the World Humanitarian Summit.

Significantly, UNHCR established a dedicated fund for youth-led protection projects. The Youth Initiative Fund supports refugee, IDP and stateless youth in designing and implementing protection-informed projects such as in Tongogara Refugee Camp in Zimbabwe where refugee youth set up a psycho-social first aid group to address the many needs of newly arriving refugees in the camp. And in Brazil, a diverse group of refugee youth wrote a song and directed a video depicting the reality of flight into asylum in an attempt to combat misperceptions amongst the host community about why people seek refuge in Brazil. The video was shown at a number of festivals and picked up by Brazilian media.

These community-based projects build upon the existing capacities of youth and provide them with the support needed to develop confidence and sometimes new life skills. They often promote rights awareness, peaceful coexistence and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. Many of the projects target youth themselves, but also seek to benefit others in their communities, including older persons or persons with disabilities.

Since the inception of the Fund in 2013, 69 youth-led projects have been supported in 34 countries globally, including 25 projects that are being implemented in 2016. Participatory monitoring and evaluation tools are built into the programs to track progress, outcomes and impact, as well as to gather lessons learned for future iteration.

We are also expanding partnerships to strengthen programmatic responses for youth. For example,

- In Botswana, UNHCR piloted the Leadership, Education and Empowerment Programme (LEEP) together with US-based NGO Scottie's Place, based on feedback from young people about the value they place on peer-to-peer support and educational achievement. LEEP is an after-school initiative that promotes academic achievement, leadership and community development, and encourages adolescent girls and boys in transitioning from primary to secondary school. The programme is implemented by young adults recruited from the refugee community and trained as programme leaders and instructors. As a result of LEEP, 85% of students saw their grades improve and nearly 90% of students reported that both their self-esteem and confidence had been strengthened. LEEP has now been handed over to the community and is led by two young people trained through the project.
- In 2015, UNHCR developed the Refugee Community Youth Worker programme in Malawi together with Jesuit Refugee Services and JC: HEM. The project involved the development and implementation of a certified training programme on youth and community work. The Refugee Community Youth Workers are helping to change negative attitudes towards young people within the community. Based upon the positive outcomes, the initiative will be expanded to Kenya and Chad in the second half of 2016.
- We are also working with the International Olympic Committee and Terre des Hommes to develop guidance on sports programming for the protection of youth.

And since much of my presentation was inspired by them, I must say a few words about the Global Refugee Youth Consultations process itself, led jointly by UNHCR and the Women's Refugee Commission. The Consultations created space for young refugees to engage in participatory dialogue with other youth and relevant stakeholders, encouraged their involvement in local, national and regional and youth alliances and networks, and supported leadership and empowerment opportunities for participants. The Consultations consisted of a series of ten national consultations, a number of local consultations and a global one. During

the Global Consultation held here in Geneva last week, refugee youth representatives from the national consultations developed a set of seven Core Actions for Refugee Youth, which they presented at a Stakeholder Dialogue attended by the High Commissioner and representatives of NGOs and Governments. The Core Actions will help guide UNHCR's efforts to strengthen youth-inclusive protection programming:

1. Work with refugee youth to recognise, develop & utilise their skills and capacities;
2. Support refugee youth to initiate and facilitate connections across boundaries;
3. Support refugee youth empowerment through meaningful engagement;
4. Ensure youth specific refugee protection;
5. Work with refugee youth for better information including through networking opportunities;
6. Enable refugee youth's physical and mental well-being; and
7. Generate data and evidence in order to support accountability.

The Consultations highlighted the capacities of young people as agents for positive change in their communities. All of the participants were inspiring, such as Joseph, a Congolese refugee living in Uganda who has completed a university degree in the United States and returned to Cyangwali refugee settlement in Uganda to work with the youth organization he and other young refugees from Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan and the DRC founded in order to promote refugees' access to education. During the Consultations Joseph said: "We are refugees, and importantly we are young: we can change our communities." Joseph is not exceptional, he's representative of this growing demographic of displaced and stateless populations across the world.

II. The Way Forward, UNHCR's Engagement with and for Young People

UNHCR is committed to strengthening its work with and for young people, and to engaging young refugees, IDPs and stateless persons as effective partners in our protection and assistance program. And we'll continue to do this by recognizing and nurturing their skills and capacities. As Aya, one of the female participants in the Refugee Consultations said last week: "We don't want you to do things for us, we want you to support us to do what we are already doing, to do things *with* us."

Heeding Aya's call, we are setting in motion a new paradigm for youth engagement:

- UNHCR will build upon the outcomes of the Global Refugee Youth Consultations and establish an action plan for implementing the seven Core Actions for Refugee Youth.
- With a view to improving the relevance and effectiveness of youth programming, UNHCR will strengthen the generation and use of age and sex disaggregated data on refugee, internally displaced and stateless youth.
- UNHCR will expand age, gender and diversity responsive initiatives that contribute to the protection and development of forcibly displaced and stateless youth, including through innovative approaches such as the Youth Initiative Fund. We will work with young people to ensure that existing programs are responsive to the specific needs of youth in the areas of education (including informal education, connected learning and vocational training), health care (including psychosocial support and sexual and reproductive health care), SGBV prevention and response, livelihoods (including skills-building for young entrepreneurs), and sports and recreation.

- UNHCR will strengthen efforts to promote youth leadership development programs, in particular those that strengthen intergenerational and inter-group dialogue.
- UNHCR will encourage its field operations to work with displaced and stateless youth as genuine partners in community management and decision-making structures.
- UNHCR will redouble advocacy for the inclusion of refugee, internally displaced and stateless youth in national youth plans, development plans and national services.
- And we'll help build new partnerships and open up opportunities for refugee, internally displaced and stateless youth at national and global levels, including exploring expanded partnerships for education and employment opportunities.

III. Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The protection of forcibly displaced and stateless youth is not only a legal and social responsibility, but also an investment in the future.

(Another quote ...)

UNHCR looks forward to working closely with States and key partners, in particular displaced and stateless young persons themselves, to advance this agenda.