

## **Update on UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific Executive Committee 2006**

### **Part A: Major Developments**

- In Timor-Leste, following the outbreak of the crisis in April, UNHCR quickly mobilized some 14 international staff, including through stand-by agreements with partner agencies. Over USD \$4.8 million was provided for an emergency response in the sectors of protection, shelter, and household items for about 30,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) out of approximately 150,000 displaced in some 56 sites and makeshift camps inside Dili and host communities outside of the capital. Decongestion of overcrowded camps contributed to reducing and avoiding incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and major outbreaks of disease. As part of the inter-agency collaborative effort, UNHCR provided leadership in establishing an overall protection framework for all IDPs, and continues to implement its protection activities in close cooperation with the national authorities and other stakeholders.
- Sri Lanka has descended into conflict despite the four-year cease-fire, resulting in over 217,000 internally displaced, an unstable security situation for staff, and, as of beginning of September, nearly 12,000 new refugees arriving in Tamil Nadu, India. UNHCR is reinforcing its response capacity particularly in the north and east, and is appealing for some USD 5 million to enable its participation in protection and assistance under the inter-agency response.
- UNHCR is taking advantage of recent openings in the situation in Nepal, bolstered by the support and strong efforts of the international community. The Office is focusing on registration of the refugees in camps in the south-east of the country, planned to start in early October; promotion of durable solutions, including repatriation and resettlement, for refugees in the camps in Nepal; and an active participation in the international response to the IDP situation in the country through protection monitoring and advocacy, and the establishment of a presence in Nepalgunj and Biratnagar.
- In Bangladesh, despite setbacks in providing assistance to 20,000 remaining refugees in camps in the south of the country, UNHCR has been promoting, with strong support from the international community, a two-pronged approach: first, the short term improvement of the standards of protection and assistance in the camps, including through the involvement of other UN agencies and partners in the camps and refugee hosting areas; and second, a longer term push towards finding durable solutions for these populations.
- UNHCR is facing challenges in the completion of its tsunami response operation in the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam and Nias Island in Indonesia, and is conducting a review of the implementation strategy in order to ensure the appropriate use of funding and efficiency of response to the tsunami disaster, in close cooperation with relevant national authorities.

- A second tri-partite technical meeting between UNHCR, Cambodia and Viet Nam took place in Phnom Penh in August 2006 to review the progress made, as a result of the framework provided by the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to resolve the Montagnard question. Durable solutions for the 750 Montagnards specifically referred under the MOU are nearly achieved, with only 26 remaining in Cambodia, eight of whom are scheduled for resettlement at the end of August. UNHCR monitoring missions have covered more than 60 per cent of the returnees.
- In Myanmar, UNHCR has been granted access to the southeast, although access to areas mostly affected by displacement remains restricted. Following her visit to Myanmar in July, the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) presented to the authorities the possibility of an inter-agency assessment in Northern Kayin State and Bago Division, from where thousands were displaced with 3,000 fleeing to Thailand. The Office is also maintaining its operations on behalf of the 680,000 stateless residents of Northern Rakhine State (of whom 236,000 are returnees).

## **Part B: Progress on Strategic Objectives and Agenda for Protection**

Strategic Objective I: Advocate for, and support governments in the creation and maintenance of an international protection regime;

*Reinforcement of the international legal framework (AfP Goal 1, Objective 1)*

- In Indonesia, UNHCR continued to pursue its advocacy for the accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Regional Representation facilitated the successful launch of the Handbook for Parliamentarians on Refugee Protection and provided a translated version of the Handbook to Members of Parliament.
- UNHCR welcomes the recent expression of interest by the Government of Nauru in acceding to the 1951 Convention and stands ready to provide further guidance and examples of international best practice.
- UNHCR supports renewed efforts in Papua New Guinea aimed at the withdrawal of its reservations to the 1951 Convention.

*Establishment of national protection structures (AfP Goal 1, Objective 2)*

- Following the High Commissioner's visit to China, UNHCR and the Chinese authorities remain engaged in discussions on the status, situation and treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees in China, and in particular on legislation regarding status determination procedures as well as other measures aimed at widening the humanitarian space in China.
- In Hong Kong SAR, UNHCR will continue to engage the government in the refugee status determination (RSD) process, building on the positive developments recently attained by sharing responsibilities in the assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees.

- In Asia, a prototype Regional Protection Hub is being set up this year with the addition of staff and resources devolved from Headquarters (both the Bureau and the Department of International Protection Services). With a view to a more consistent implementation of the regional strategy, particularly in terms of bringing protection delivery closer to operations, the Hub will provide support in refugee status determination, capacity building and support to regional processes.
- As reported in earlier Standing Committee meetings, Thailand has restarted the Provincial Admission Boards to regularize the situation of some remaining 27,000 Myanmar refugees in the border areas. Criteria are being further reviewed as regards the admission of new arrivals from Myanmar. In a significant breakthrough in 2006, the Government also agreed in principle to the establishment of UNHCR Legal Aid Centres –a first in a closed camp environment - and to issue identity documents for all refugees. The Office is currently pursuing their long awaited implementation with the authorities.
- Despite a significant impact due to budget cuts in India, protection delivery has been enhanced through a more structured RSD regime. Additionally, as of September 2006, the interviewing and profiling of all Myanmar refugee women and girls has been completed at the Women's Protection Clinic, with gaps in protection delivery effectively identified and both short and long term solutions implemented for women and their families across-the-board.

Strategic Objective II: Ensure international standards of protection for girls, boys, women and men of concern to UNHCR are met;

- In Malaysia, the Office is encouraged by progress in access by persons of concern to social services, particularly health care at 50 per cent discounted rates in all public hospitals and clinics as per the Ministry of Health Instruction.

Strategic Objective III: Pursue voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, resettlement or local integration for refugees, with a special focus on those in protracted refugee situations;

*Focus on protracted situations (AfP Goal 5, Objective 1, AfP Goal 5, Objective 5)*

- UNHCR has developed stronger relationships with concerned donor governments through the formation of specialized working groups to focus on the protracted refugee situations in Nepal and in Bangladesh. The Core Group on Nepal has met seven times in the past year, and its efforts of joint advocacy have seen results in demonstrating a united position towards resolving the longstanding situation of refugees in the country. Similarly, a number of countries have constituted a Steering Group for Bangladesh both in Geneva and in Dhaka to define common action to benefit refugees in the camps in Cox's Bazaar.
- In Thailand, UNHCR has been able to move forward on solutions-oriented activities and a major resettlement programme from all nine camps has been introduced involving ten countries. This has enabled 13,000 refugees to be submitted for resettlement as the Government's position on resettlement has softened. Additionally, an agreement was reached with the Government to provide language and job training in the camps to prepare

refugees for durable solutions. During the High Commissioner's recent mission, constructive discussions were held regarding the opening up of employment opportunities for refugees.

Strategic Objective IV: Strengthen UNHCR's external relations through improved public information, public awareness, media relations and fundraising

- UNHCR continues to reinforce its public awareness strategy in Asia, promoting events such as the Tokyo Film Festival, the Nansen Award and other public occasions that could contribute to its advocacy with the media and increase opportunities in private sector fundraising.
- UNHCR would like to acknowledge prompt financial and logistical support by Australia to the emergency response to the IDP situation in Timor-Leste.

*25 September 2006*