



UNHCR

GLOBAL CONSULTATIONS: Update 31 January 2001

Endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) and welcomed by the United Nations Secretary-General, UNHCR's Global Consultations seek to promote the full and effective implementation of the Refugee Convention -- in its 50th year -- and to develop new approaches, tools and standards to ensure its continuing vitality and relevance. The Global Consultations are taking place against a background of debate around large and protracted refugee situations, the high costs of asylum systems in industrialised countries, the burden on developing countries of hosting refugees, and the real or perceived abuse of asylum systems.

"The Global Consultations reflect the heightened recognition over recent years of the fact that the refugee problem is an international one and that crafting responses to address many of today's issues is best approached on the basis of multilateral cooperation, fully informed by the protection concerns at stake, as well as the dilemmas and challenges in addressing them in all regions", says Director of the Department of International Protection, Erika Feller. "It is up to us, together, to renew and revitalise the refugee protection system through the Global Consultations," emphasises Feller.

The Consultations have been designed along three parallel tracks or circles.¹ At the Organisational Meeting for the Global Consultations on International Protection which took place on 12 December 2000, delegations expressed a high level of interest in and support for the Global Consultations and adopted the Work Programme as follows:

- **1st Track – Inter-Governmental Event**

The "first track" seeks to reaffirm the commitment of States parties to full and effective implementation of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and to promote further accessions to both instruments. This goal will be pursued, primarily, through a major inter-governmental event, organised by

¹ Originally, the process was conceptualized as three concentric circles. Questions have recently been raised about difficulties inherent in the notion of concentric circles, including as regards their priority order and the content of the circles. To obviate them, UNHCR has started to use the terminology of "tracks" rather than circles.

the Swiss Government and UNHCR towards the end of 2001 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Convention.

- **2nd Track – Expert Roundtables**

The Consultations will also provide a forum to take stock of the **developments in refugee law** and to examine a number of emerging issues. This will be done in the **second track** through a series of expert discussions on specific interpretative aspects of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. The process will comprise four Expert Roundtables, drawn from governments of States parties, NGOs, academia, the judiciary, and the legal profession. Following informal consultations with a wide range of States, NGOs and other interested parties, UNHCR has identified issues for consideration by experts, which are listed below and on which background papers have been commissioned from scholars:

ROUNDTABLES	TOPICS
1st Roundtable Date: 3-4 May 2001 Venue: Lisbon Co-Organiser: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington D.C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cessation (Article 1C) • Exclusion (Article 1F)
2nd Roundtable Date: 9-10 July 2001 Venue: Cambridge Co-Organiser: Lauterpacht Research Centre for International Law in Cambridge, U.K.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of Non-refoulement (Article 33) • Family Unity (Final Act of the 1951 UN Conference)
3rd Roundtable Date: 6-8 September 2001 Venue: San Remo Co-Organiser: International Institute of Humanitarian Law at San Remo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of a Particular Social Group (Article 1A(2)) • Gender-related Persecution (Article 1A(2)) • Internal Flight Alternative
4th Roundtable Date: 8-9 November 2001 Venue: Geneva Co-Organiser: Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal Entry (Article 31) • Supervisory Responsibility (Article 35)

To allow in-depth examination and exchange of ideas, participation in the Roundtables will be limited to some 20 experts. However, to promote the widest possible consideration of the topics at issue, the discussion papers will be posted on UNHCR's website. Comments/contributions on these papers should be addressed to: Ms. Kate Jastram (Jastram@unhcr.org).

- **3rd Track – ExCom Process²**

The **third track** of the Consultations will be structured around a number of **issues not fully covered by the Convention**. This process is designed, firstly, to foster a common understanding of the protection challenges and enhance cooperation to address them; secondly, to identify and promote practical responses to protection problems; and thirdly, to lead to the development of new approaches, tools, and standards to strengthen protection in areas not adequately covered by the Convention. The discussions will seek to achieve concrete outcomes, which could include, depending on the issue: the identification of appropriate mechanisms and practical arrangements; tools to implement guidelines; guidance to States or to UNHCR; and Executive Committee conclusions.

The discussions will take place within the framework of UNHCR's Executive Committee at meetings in March, June and September 2001 (continued in 2002). They will centre on identifying and developing practical responses around four broad themes:

	MEETINGS	THEMES/ISSUES
2001	1 st meeting: 8-9 March	1 st Theme: Protection of Refugees in Mass Influx Situations
	2 nd meeting: 28-29 June	2 nd Theme: Protection of Refugees in the Context of Individual Asylum Systems a) Refugee protection and migration control b) Asylum processes (access to refugee protection [including safe third country notion and irregular or secondary movements]; treatment and return of persons not in need of international protection)
	3 rd meeting: 27-28 September	2 nd Theme: Protection of Refugees in the Context of Individual Asylum Systems (continued) b) Asylum processes (continued: reception of asylum-seekers, including standards of treatment; expedited procedures [including notion of safe country of origin]; special problems [undocumented asylum-seekers; uncooperative asylum-seekers]; complementary forms of protection c) Strengthening protection capacity in host countries
2002	4 th meeting: February/March	3 rd Theme: The Search for Protection-Based Solutions a) Voluntary repatriation b) Local integration c) Resettlement
		4 th Theme: Protection of Refugee Women and Refugee Children The appropriate form and format of discussions are still to be decided.

² See Work Programme for "Third Track" Issues in the Context of the Executive Committee Framework (Working Document), EC/GC/01/1, 15 January 2001.

International solidarity and responsibility or burden sharing, as well as protection aspects of refugee women and refugee children are crosscutting themes, which will be considered throughout the discussions of the various topics.

- **Regional Meetings**

To ensure that the Consultations have a truly global reach, it is crucial to bring in the different regional/national perspectives of governments, as well as NGOs and other experts and refugees themselves, particularly on the issues for discussion under the “third track”. UNHCR will organise a number of Regional Meetings in order to broaden the participation on issues on the agenda of particular interest to one or other of the regions.

For further information, please contact:

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