

Foreword

by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The years since the last edition of *The State of the World's Refugees* have witnessed the emergence of a number of trends that have significantly affected refugees and asylum. Since 2000, the number of refugees has fallen steadily, to just over nine million people at the beginning of 2005. This represents the lowest figure in almost a quarter of a century. This is partly due to the fact that in the last five years there were fewer refugee-producing crises and several conflicts came to an end thus allowing refugee return. Among the most significant repatriation movements is that of the four million Afghans who were assisted to return home since 2002.

Inter-state conflict is less prevalent today than internal strife and civil war, resulting in fewer refugee flows but more internal displacement. People who would otherwise seek safety in neighbouring states are more frequently compelled to remain within the borders of their own country, most often in similar conditions as refugees. Two long-running civil conflicts in Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, accounted for an estimated 7.5 million internally displaced people in 2005.

Another trend has been the declining number of asylum seekers, which at the beginning of 2005 was at its lowest in recent years. Though many factors may contribute to this drop, one apparent cause is the increasingly restrictive measures states have taken to limit access to asylum as they attempt to manage migration and safeguard their security. In the context of the ever growing impact of mixed migration flows, asylum seekers are often using the same illicit channels as illegal migrants, and as a result are denied access to asylum procedures states are obliged to provide under international law.

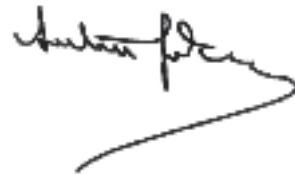
In the context of the ever growing impact of globalization and mixed migration flows, preserving asylum requires that we be able to identify those in need of protection. In public opinion, there has been a blurring of illegal migration and security problems with asylum and refugee issues. This demonstrates the importance of combating intolerance and challenging the notion that refugees and asylum seekers are the agents of insecurity rather than its victims.

The past few years have also been characterized by efforts on the part of states, NGOs, the UN and other international organizations to respond to the new humanitarian challenges. In the area of refugee protection, UNHCR led several collaborative initiatives aimed at strengthening aspects of the international protection regime, ranging from providing specific aspects of protection to addressing root causes of displacement and policy development on issues not explicitly addressed by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Recent years have also seen a revival of efforts to bring an end to the refugee cycle through durable solutions, with special emphasis on bridging the gap between humanitarian and development assistance. Development plays a crucial role in ensuring that peace and economic recovery can take root in a post-conflict situation.

The growing recognition that the United Nations as a whole had to find a better way to protect and assist internally displaced persons led to a stride forward in September 2005, when the Inter-Agency Standing Committee attributed responsibilities in situations of internal displacement to various agencies. UNHCR was tasked to lead the response in the areas of protection, camp coordination and management, and emergency shelter. Addressing internal displacement is indeed an issue where flexible perspectives are needed from the international community as a whole, and UNHCR will be fully engaged in this effort.

This edition of *The State of the World's Refugees* examines these and other important issues in depth. Through critical analysis, it presents an account of key developments since 2000 and their impact on human displacement and the principle of asylum. The book also reviews the challenges states face as they reconcile legitimate national interests with their international legal and humanitarian obligations towards uprooted people. Finally, it assesses the impact of the complex and changing environment in which humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, operate.

The many challenges to asylum and to humanitarian response require that we think anew. Never before has it been so important to ensure a multilateral dialogue and enhance our response capacity through greater burden and responsibility-sharing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'António Guterres', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

António Guterres