

Agenda item 4 (a)

66th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High
Commissioner's Programme, Geneva, 21-24 June 2016

New Approaches to Solutions

Introductory Remarks by Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Seeking solutions is the second prong of UNHCR's mandate, and is inextricably related to everything we do. The entire humanitarian system, in fact, presumes their availability. After all, international protection and assistance is palliative by design—and therefore temporary. Yet barely more than 200,000 refugees returned home voluntarily last year. Less than 110,000 were resettled in third countries. While both of these numbers are marginal increases over the previous year's statistics, they are tiny fractions of the total refugee population. Solutions remain alarmingly elusive in a system predicated upon short-term displacement.

This dearth of solutions is best represented by the nearly 6.7 million refugees in protracted displacement situations at the end of 2015. This is already some 300,000 more than 2014, and we can expect this category to grow considerably as the conflict in Syria crosses the 5-year threshold for our definition of "protracted".¹ As old emergencies persist, new ones do not wait to emerge. The result is mounting pressure on an overburdened humanitarian system. Thus, the need for solutions is plain: they are absolutely essential to turning the tide against this unprecedented displacement crisis we are witnessing.

Mr. Chairman,

The stakes could not be higher. As long as solutions remain out of reach for the vast majority of those we serve, UNHCR will struggle to keep pace with ever-increasing demands for protection and assistance. The High Commissioner touched upon this urgency on Monday, describing 2016 as a "watershed moment for the refugee cause...a year to take collective responsibility and action to end the conflicts which force people to flee and also to help the millions of people whose lives have been destroyed by this violence."

This is why we need new approaches to solutions, ones that are better equipped to confront today's complex challenges. To be effective, we must sharpen our focus on comprehensive solutions: meaning, we must push for not only the *availability* of durable solutions as a legal matter, but their practical *viability* as well. In short, we need to redouble our efforts to help persons of concern prepare themselves for whatever solutions that may appear.

Refugees, wherever they are, must have access to the building blocks of self-reliance and resilience if they are to take meaningful advantage of any durable solution. Uganda's generous policies towards refugees provide positive examples of the benefits—to both host States and refugees alike—of respecting

¹ Defined as a situation in which 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for five years or longer in a given asylum country.

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a full range of refugee rights. I saw this firsthand during my trip there in November. But, to be clear, these benefits of self-reliance extend to *all* durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation and resettlement. The reason for this is straightforward: displacement robs refugees of the very assets they will need, for example, to return home or resettle elsewhere. Allowing them the means to re-build their self-reliance, and develop their resilience to further shocks, is a meaningful step towards preparing them for any durable solution. In addition, such a progressive approach mitigates the harms of spending years on end in a limbo of deprivation and dependency.

Mr. Chairman,

We are making strides in this regard, including by exploring how to better work with our development partners from the outset of a crisis. My colleagues Ms. Batchelor and Mr. Corliss will provide more details on these various initiatives and why they are so important to our work today.