

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs**  
**3 – 5 JULY 2012 - International Conference Center Geneva**

***BACKGROUND PAPER***

**Asia-Pacific Regional Session**  
**Protracted Refugee Situations**

*Wednesday 4 July 2012, 09h00 - 10h45 – Room 4*

Asia is “a continent on the move”, a vast landmass characterized by large scale population movements predominantly to urban centers that are both a motor of unprecedented economic growth and expansion but also a challenge to concepts of state sovereignty and national security.

The region continues to host five protracted refugee situations divided between one major situation involving Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and four medium-sized situations respectively in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Thailand. Pakistan and Iran currently host 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees, including some who have been there for over 30 years, while Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Thailand together host up to 1.3 million refugees who have been there for over 20 years.

A highly mobile, often young population of asylum-seekers and refugees originating from these protracted refugee situations increasingly move irregularly, in search of better protection and durable solutions. Melting in with the overall population movement in the region they are often heading to middle income or industrialized countries such as Australia to the East; or Kazakhstan and Europe towards the West, whereas countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and other Central Asian countries are often used for transit purposes. The prevalence of criminal smuggling and trafficking rings exacerbates the situation of already vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees on the move. With the absence of legal and normative frameworks in the region to underpin predictable refugee protection the preservation of asylum in a mixed migration environment is made even more difficult. Only 19 countries out of 48 are Refugee Convention signatories and few implement the Refugee Convention. Nevertheless, Asia hosts the largest number of refugees worldwide, largely driven by political considerations. This has generated host community fatigue and shrinking asylum space adding to the challenges of a fragile protection environment.

UNHCR has been working on concrete steps to convert the practice of hosting refugees based on a transitory approach to a much more predictable situation based on burden-sharing through the Bali Process and the Almaty Process. In this context, efforts are made to stabilize refugee populations in the region taking into account the needs of host communities.

Last year, the Asia-Pacific regional session focused on the protracted refugee situations and the importance of partnerships to attain local solutions, pending a durable solution. This year's regional session will explore how UNHCR and civil society can work together to address irregular onward movement and promote greater ownership of asylum in the region. In this regard, the session will highlight good examples of what civil society has been able to do in certain countries in the region to advocate for the stabilization of asylum-seekers and refugees and greater ownership of asylum by governments.

The regional session will also include an update on important developments that have taken place since last year's NGO Consultations concerning the Afghan refugee situation as well as the refugee situations in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand.