

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

BACKGROUND PAPER

SIDE MEETING

Opportunities and Challenges in Addressing Protracted Refugee Situations:
Colombian, Iraqi and Somali Displacement

Wednesday 4 July 2012, 08h00 – 09h00 – Room 4

“The Executive Committee expresses concern about the particular difficulties faced by the millions of refugees in protracted situations, and emphasizes the need to redouble international efforts and cooperation to find practical and comprehensive approaches to resolving their plight and to realize durable solutions for them, consistent with international law and relevant General Assembly resolutions, while bearing in mind broader political processes that may be under way to address protracted refugee situations, including their root causes;¹”

Over two thirds of the refugees under the mandate of UNHCR – more than 7.2 million persons – live in situations of protracted exile in 26 countries. In addition, millions more find themselves without a foreseeable solution to their displacement within the borders of their countries.

In basic terms, refugees in protracted exile are without an immediate prospect for a durable solution. They cannot repatriate to their homeland, as in most cases it is not safe for them to do so. They are not able to settle permanently in their country of first asylum, as the host States does not allow their indefinite presence on its territory. They do not have the option of resettlement, as no third country has agreed to admit them.

The detrimental effects of long-lasting and intractable exile on the physical, mental, social, cultural and economic well-being of refugees are severe. Further, refugees in protracted situations are exposed to a range of protection risks. As often in such situations, women and girls are particularly vulnerable. As time passes, and resources decrease, physical and sexual violence against them tends to rise.

Protracted refugee situations impose considerable challenges to host States. Most States hosting the largest protracted refugee populations are developing countries, including some of the least developed. They face limited resources, growing populations and poverty. Scarce commodities such as water and land raise tensions between refugees and host communities. National security concerns can be triggered.

While the challenges are many, opportunities do exist. While awaiting a durable solution, refugees often make positive contributions to their host societies, while at the same time

¹ *Conclusion on Protracted Refugee Situations No. 109 (LXI) - 2009*

enhancing their education and skills and fostering their own self-reliance. Mobility within countries of asylum and beyond allows refugees in protracted situations to access employment, remittance support, and education opportunities. Temporary employment authorization for both skilled and unskilled workers can provide opportunities. The usage of all three solutions strategically and in a mutually reinforcing manner secures outcomes, may increase protection space, and maximize the benefits for refugees, host countries and other stakeholders.

Partnerships in addressing protracted refugee situations are critical. Joint programming with development actors can improve refugee hosting areas, win favourable support from governments, and open eventual pathways to local integration, including in its legal aspects (i.e. long term legal residency and naturalization).

The protracted refugee situations of Colombian, Iraqi and Somali refugees present unique challenges, and there is no one common template that will provide immediate resolution. Good practices and lessons learned from other protracted situations are, however, of significant value.

The 2012 NGO Consultations side session on Protracted Refugee Situations aims to discuss some of the current challenges facing Colombian, Somali and Iraqi refugees and allow for brainstorming on strategic perspectives. A specific issue to address will be partnership, international solidarity, and how involved actors can strengthen their efforts and partner to identify appropriate innovative and practical solutions.

Recommended Readings:

- Permanent crises? Unlocking the protracted displacement of refugees and internally displaced persons, Dr Katy Long, Refugee Studies Center, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)/ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), October 2011 ([http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/9C65376E1F9DBAAEC125793D003ADC24/\\$file/unlocking-protracted-displacement-policy-overview.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/9C65376E1F9DBAAEC125793D003ADC24/$file/unlocking-protracted-displacement-policy-overview.pdf))
- A surrogate state? The role of UNHCR in protracted refugee situations, Amy Slaughter and Jeff Crisp, Policy Development and Evaluation Service, UNHCR, January 2009 (<http://www.unhcr.org/4981cb432.html>)
- Unlocking crises of protracted displacement for refugees and internally displaced persons, Refugee Studies Center, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)/ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), March 2012 (<http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/governance/unlocking-crisis>)
- Unlocking Protracted Displacement of Refugees and IDPs: Somali and Iraqi displacements and policy responses, Forced Migration Online, March 2012 <http://www.forcedmigration.org/podcasts-videos-photos/podcasts/unlocking-protracted-displacement>
- Between a protracted and a crisis situation: policy responses to Somali refugees in Kenya, Lindley, Anna (2011), Refugee Survey Quarterly, 30 (4). pp. 14-49.