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**Overview of UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific****A. Situational context**

The Asia-Pacific region is home to one third of the world's refugees – some 3.5 million people – and encompasses 45 countries and territories. While only 20 countries in the region have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Asia has generously hosted millions of refugees and other persons of concern for decades. States continue to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring access to asylum and protection for refugees, while working with UNHCR on sustainable solutions, particularly to protracted situations.

The more than 2.4 million Afghan refugees constitute some 70 per cent of the refugees in the region. The Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan have hosted millions of Afghan refugees for over three decades. Pakistan's new national policy on Afghan refugees extends the tripartite agreement on voluntary repatriation and the validity of the proof of registration cards until December 2015. In addition to hosting over 800,000 registered Afghan refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented a comprehensive regularization plan for undocumented Afghans in the country, providing legal temporary stay arrangements on the basis of renewable residence permits placed in passports. May 2014 will mark the third anniversary of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries.

Addressing the challenges of irregular movements – particularly at sea – is a global priority for UNHCR. In 2013, boat tragedies in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean caused an estimated 615 casualties. Renewed violence in Myanmar contributed to a significant increase in irregular maritime movements. A significant increase in secondary movements towards Europe has been observed, notably of Afghan refugees heading to Turkey.

The South-East Asia and East Asia and Pacific sub-regions experienced a number of incidents of *refoulement* of refugees recognized by UNHCR, including of Syrian refugees, reflecting a significant narrowing of protection space. Responding to mounting maritime arrivals, some States have adopted restrictive legislative and asylum policies and pursued operational measures to curb them. These include interception of boats at points of departure; "help on" policies<sup>1</sup>; and interception at points of arrival followed by prolonged detention, which can result in limited or delayed access to asylum procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "help on" describes the policy of certain countries to provide fuel, food and water to distressed vehicles and to facilitate their onward journey to another country, which can lead to loss of life at sea.

## B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

### *Safeguarding access to protection and asylum, including in the context of mixed migration and in urban settings*

In 2014, UNHCR will continue to conduct mandate refugee status determination (RSD) in those countries without national eligibility procedures, while supporting their establishment. The Office will also promote protection-sensitive migration management systems, including alternatives to detention for asylum-seekers. In countries with established asylum systems, UNHCR will provide capacity-building and technical expertise to enhance the quality of the decision making and the fairness and efficiency of the systems.

In 2013, a decision by the Court of Final Appeal of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong confirmed the responsibility of the authorities to undertake an independent screening of claims of feared persecution, in order to protect against *refoulement*. UNHCR will assist the authorities with building capacity to ensure adequate independent screening.

In 2014, the Government of Japan initiated a review and analysis of its asylum system to increase its efficiency. UNHCR will support the process by providing technical advice.

UNHCR continues to advocate for improved protection in the context of irregular maritime movements, including through the Bali Process.<sup>2</sup> In March 2013, under the auspices of the Bali Process Regional Support Office, the Government of Indonesia and UNHCR convened a Regional Roundtable on Irregular Movements by Sea. Stakeholders discussed key challenges facing States in the Asia-Pacific region and identified areas for cooperation and coordination at national and regional levels. The Regional Support Office is following up on the conclusions from the Roundtable.

Other multilateral initiatives in the region included a Special Conference on the Irregular Movement of Persons, convened by Indonesia in August 2013. The Conference adopted the Jakarta Declaration, which reiterates the need for a protection-sensitive regional approach, recognizing the importance of burden-sharing and collective responsibility. In 2014, UNHCR will continue to support regional cooperation to complement the efforts of individual countries, by collaborating with regional bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Bali Process.

In 2013, Kazakhstan hosted a second Ministerial Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration. A significant outcome was the adoption of operating modalities for translating the Almaty Process<sup>3</sup> into practice and advancing regional dialogue and practical cooperation on issues of common concern.

Preserving and improving the protection environment for urban refugees remains a priority. Offices in the region are working to design strategies and projects to address some of the protection challenges in urban settings, including xenophobia, racism and sexual and gender-based violence. In November 2013, the Asia-Pacific Emergency Management Platform organized a Forum on Urban Humanitarian Response in Malaysia. The Forum permitted UNHCR and other stakeholders to discuss challenges in emergency response in urban environments in the Asia and Pacific region, to share lessons learned, and to identify priority areas for future collaboration. Other opportunities to bring about solutions, such as through access to long-term visas and work permits, will be pursued throughout the region.

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<sup>2</sup> The Bali Process is a political forum for States focused on migration, co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup> The Almaty Process is a consultative process among stakeholders, facilitated by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. It aims to foster differentiated but protection-sensitive border management and asylum systems in the Central Asia sub-region.

*Seeking solutions for protracted refugee situations*

In this significant year of transition for Afghanistan, the need to pursue sustainable solutions for Afghan refugees is all the more critical. Within the framework of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, the three concerned Governments, UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have prepared a portfolio of project proposals to address the needs of Afghan refugees and host communities and to advance solutions on a regional basis. This approach offers an integrated platform for multilateral cooperation and coordination in each country.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to other groups of long-staying refugees, including refugees from Bhutan in Nepal and refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia. The large-scale resettlement programme begun in Nepal in 2007 has allowed more than 86,000 refugees from Bhutan to begin new lives in eight different resettlement countries. As a result, the camp population remaining in Nepal has been reduced by two-thirds as of end-2013.

In anticipation of political developments in Myanmar, UNHCR is working closely with governments and partners in the region to prepare for the eventual voluntary repatriation of refugees from Myanmar. Cross-border coordination continues on both side of the Thai-Myanmar border.

UNHCR will sustain support to the Government of Bangladesh in addressing the needs of the 30,000 registered refugees in the country who reside in two official camps. Bangladesh also hosts an estimated 200,000 people living in a refugee-like situation.

In cooperation with concerned governments, UNHCR will continue to facilitate the voluntary return of Sri Lankan refugees through transportation and reintegration support. The Office will also engage in post-return monitoring, together with relevant partners, to help address reintegration challenges.

*Ensuring protection and durable solutions for internally displaced persons*

Typhoon Haiyan swept through central Philippines on 8 November 2013, affecting 14 million persons, with over 4 million displaced. For the first time since the adoption of the Transformative Agenda, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee declared a Level 3 emergency. In support of the Government of the Philippines, and as a part of the inter-agency response, UNHCR co-led the protection cluster with the Government. The Office assisted over 450,000 persons with the provision of solar lanterns, emergency shelter and other relief items, focusing on persons with specific vulnerabilities and those in remote locations. With other cluster members, UNHCR has undertaken protection needs assessments and monitoring, to ensure standards of and equal access to assistance. Support has been provided to help re-establish and reinforce national and local capacities to address residual protection needs and coordinate protection in the field. UNHCR continues to assist the national and local authorities to respond to conflict-induced displacements, especially in Mindanao.

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar remains estimated at over 400,000. Many lacking citizenship were displaced from their homes as a result of the 2012 inter-communal ethnic violence in Rakhine State. In 2013, UNHCR participated in the inter-agency emergency response for up to 140,000 IDPs in Rakhine State. UNHCR's priority in 2014 will be to sustain its protection and humanitarian assistance work, while continuing the search for durable solutions. It will also work with the Government to address the legal status of people from Myanmar without citizenship, both within and outside the country.

UNHCR also has a presence in Myanmar's Kachin State as part of the inter-agency response to the displacement of some 100,000 people. A tentative cessation of hostilities between Kachin rebels and Government forces has renewed hopes for peace. In the south-east of Myanmar, UNHCR is exploring the possibility of eventual return for 230,000 IDPs as well as 128,000 refugees in Thailand.

In Pakistan, UNHCR will continue to assist approximately one million persons displaced as a result of security operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by providing basic assistance, protection and monitoring in the three existing camps, and addressing their needs upon return home. There are many challenges however, as these areas remain volatile and humanitarian access is restricted.

UNHCR estimates that over 600,000 people within Afghanistan have been forcibly displaced by conflict. Many have been displaced more than once, owing to a lack of protection or livelihood opportunities in areas of return, or because of food insecurity or natural disasters. UNHCR's work with IDPs in Afghanistan in 2014 will be part of an inter-agency effort and will include leading the protection cluster to assist those still displaced by conflict and advocating for their return and reintegration. The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, recently adopted by the Afghan Government, provides a framework for durable solutions.

In Sri Lanka, UNHCR continues to work with the Government to seek durable solutions for a small group of people who remain displaced among host communities, and to advocate for the sustainable reintegration of those who have returned.

In 2014, UNHCR will work with the Government and partner agencies in Kyrgyzstan to ensure the sustainable reintegration of those displaced by ethnic violence in 2010. Programmes in community development, coexistence, livelihoods and protection will be integrated under the umbrella of the Secretary-General's Durable Solutions Initiative for Displaced People, with support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office.

#### *Reducing and preventing statelessness and protecting stateless people*

At the end of 2013, an estimated 1.4 million people were without citizenship in Asia, the largest group of them in Myanmar's Rakhine State. UNHCR will continue to work with States in mapping stateless populations throughout the region, with a view to reducing and preventing statelessness, including through the issuance of birth certificates and by participation in verification exercises.

In the context of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, UNHCR will advocate for further accessions to the statelessness treaties, for the establishment of status determination procedures, and the for revision of nationality legislation in a number of countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

Central Asia hosts large populations of stateless people or people at risk of becoming stateless. In December 2013, UNHCR supported a gathering of government officials reviewing implementation of the Kyrgyzstan National Action Plan for the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and discussing next steps. Turkmenistan has become the first country in Central Asia, and only the third in the Asia-Pacific region, to become a party to both of the statelessness conventions. Moreover, it has so far granted citizenship to over 3,900 stateless persons. The Government of Turkmenistan has proposed to host an international conference on statelessness, asylum and migration in 2014 in Ashgabat, in cooperation with UNHCR and IOM.

#### *Maintaining operations in high-risk areas and ensuring staff safety*

Afghanistan's volatile security environment has required UNHCR to set up remote delivery and monitoring mechanisms with local partners. These measures will remain necessary in

2014, due security concerns surrounding the complex political and security transition processes. Likewise, in Pakistan, UNHCR works closely with government counterparts and local partners to improve outreach in insecure areas.

## **C Financial information**

The 2014 comprehensive needs assessment budget for Asia and the Pacific, approved by the Executive Committee at its 64<sup>th</sup> session, is US\$ 581.4 million. The financial requirements for the Afghan situation, comprising operations in the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, represent some 62 per cent of this total. Financial requirements for the Myanmar operation represent some 12 per cent, and the remaining 26 per cent is shared by 18 small and medium-sized operations. A shortage of funding for the Afghan situation would weaken the momentum for solutions in the critical third year of the Solutions Strategy, and a funding shortfall in other sub-regions would have a critical impact on the delivery of key protection activities.

By comparison, in 2013, the initial, Executive Committee-approved comprehensive needs assessment budget for the Asia-Pacific region was increased during the course of the year by US\$ 68.3 million, ending the year at US\$ 594.7 million. This increase was primarily due to the establishment of supplementary budgets in response to unforeseen humanitarian needs resulting from population displacement in Myanmar and the emergency humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.