

# Don't fear refugees, help them

They are fleeing from conflict, not seeking it. To treat them as a threat is inhumane | By António Guterres

At the start of a new year already stained with bloodshed, fear of terrorism and instability is again dominating the public agenda. Anxiety and economic discontent are fueling extremism on all sides. Growing numbers of people are being driven into the hands of populists and xenophobes, and – in some extreme cases – are turning to violence.

These trends deeply affect refugees and other forcibly displaced people. On the run from trauma at home, they now find themselves confronting hostility in their places of exile, cast as scapegoats for any number of problems, from terrorism to economic hardship and perceived threats to their host

communities' way of life. They are being mischaracterized as illegal migrants, common criminals or worse.

Amidst this rising panic, we need to remember that the primary threat is not from refugees, but to them. By definition, those who are granted asylum are survivors of terrible persecution and violence, and many will have encountered grueling dangers as they fled for safety – travelling across war zones on perilous byways, forced to use smuggling rings to cross closed borders, and exposed to predatory attacks by bandits and pirates.

Last year, nearly 220,000 people fled in unsafe boats across the Mediterranean – more than three



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times the previous record during the Libyan civil war of 2011. Increases have also been seen in the Gulf of Aden, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, with 360,000 people worldwide estimated to have taken to the seas.

Globally, more than 4,300 persons were reported dead or miss-

ing at sea last year as a result of these movements, and the real number is probably considerably higher. Countless others were abused and beaten by smugglers, or kidnapped and forced to work in trafficking networks. And now, many are struggling to overcome a rising hostility in the countries where they thought they had found refuge.

This is not to deny there are security challenges for host societies, when faced with large influxes resulting from violence and instability abroad. There is always a risk, and my organization is very

alert to it. But for the most part, refugees are fleeing from conflict, not seeking a new one. To treat them as a threat rather than people in need is inhumane, ineffective, and counterproductive. One cannot deter people fleeing for their lives without escalating the dangers even more.

Amidst today's climate of fear, we must stay focused on where the biggest threats lie: to individual refugees and their families. If we want to stop those threats multiplying, metastasizing and spreading, we need to sow the seeds of a return in peace to their homelands. We do that by providing protection and support, and by helping people not only to survive, but to thrive.

Over 51 million people are forcibly displaced around the world today, more than at any other time since World War II. Multiplying conflicts, human rights violations, and statelessness as well as climate change, population growth, jobless urbanization and food and water insecurity have uprooted entire communities against their will.

This is more than an uncomfortable statistic; it is a rising challenge that has already surpassed the capacity of the humanitarian system to respond, and shows every sign of getting larger.

Yet our response to this challenge has been mixed at best, and at worst woefully inadequate. Humanitarian appeals are going

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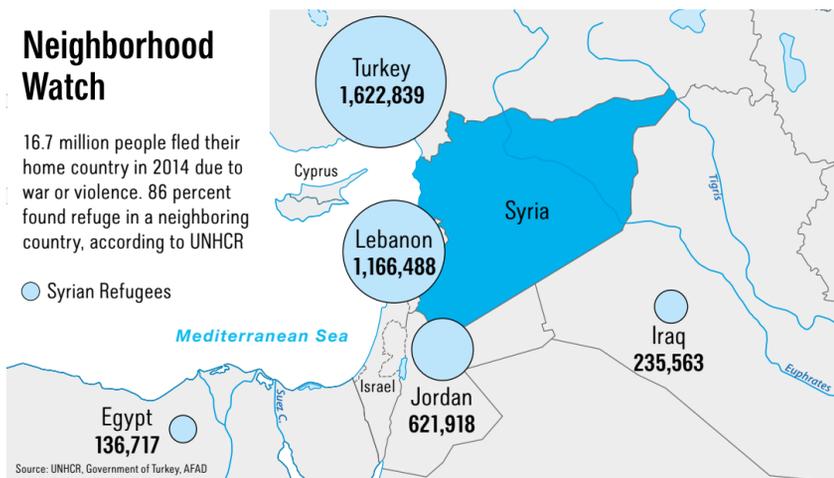
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## Neighborhood Watch

16.7 million people fled their home country in 2014 due to war or violence. 86 percent found refuge in a neighboring country, according to UNHCR

○ Syrian Refugees



massively underfunded, both for basic needs and for protection measures such as education.

At their borders, some governments are trying to lock up shop, investing instead in deterrence, carrying out pushbacks, and automatically detaining asylum seekers, including children. Italy's noble Mare Nostrum operation, which rescued over 160,000 people at sea, is now phasing out – and the EU has no plans to replace it, beyond the border surveillance of its new Triton operation launched in November. Many people could die as a result.

Focusing on border control will not solve the problem. While governments have a duty to manage immigration, their policies must be designed to ensure human lives do not end up becoming collateral damage.

The way we tackle population movements will fundamentally shape this century, with repercussions for generations. To manage them, we must make migration an option, rather than a desperate need. We must focus far more on the root causes of displacement, through conflict prevention and linking development policies and human mobility.

And we must support countries of first asylum and transit states. For the most part, people would rather stay closer to home, but they are increasingly finding their neighboring countries over-

stretched and devoid of opportunities. Small surprise that they are going further afield.

Poor countries currently accommodate nearly 90 percent of the world's refugees, and are groaning under the burden. As a result, some are turning to desperate measures to keep refugees out, not through a lack of generosity, but because they can no longer manage the crisis alone. Yet their appeals for assistance are not being met. This is not sustainable.

Just as importantly, we must do more to give refugees hope for the future, the possibility to rebuild their lives and contribute to society. In a world with more than 50 million displaced, many of whom will live years away from home, tents are not sufficient. People need the chance to learn, to find work and become invested in society – or else become excluded and dependent on aid, exposed to exploitation, abuse and radicalization.

A growing and misguided focus on the threat from refugees, rather than to refugees, has enormous and damaging repercussions. It delays the return to peace and prosperity for their countries, which would allow them to go back home. It feeds fear and resentment, with negative consequences for all. And it risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating the problem it seeks to avoid, rather than fixing the root cause.

People have been fleeing from insecurity for centuries, and today's world gives little reason to hope that this will soon change. The way countries deal with the needs of those seeking protection at their borders is an indicator of their own strength, and will play a crucial role in determining the outcome of a century that has begun so badly.

With extremely complex problems, often the best approach is to go back to first principles: protecting lives, honoring human rights, promoting tolerance and valuing diversity. In mid-January, after the vile attack on a satirical magazine in Paris, millions of people took to the streets to defend exactly those ideals. We must listen to them.

Ensuring the security and welfare of our societies is not contradictory to these principles. In fact, they are mutually reinforcing. We must not allow those who would foster hate to undermine this conviction.

The way we treat uprooted people is the front line in a battle of ideas. It will play a determining role in whether we can turn the awful tragedies of the past few years around and build a lasting peace.

If we help refugees rather than fear them, we stand a chance of breaking this cycle of violence. But we will never achieve an end to conflict if its victims continue to be mistaken for its cause. ■

# Corruption kills

Combating it requires a more comprehensive strategic approach | By Edda Müller

It almost does not matter where you look: at the terrorist activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, at drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau or Mexico, at patronage networks in Afghanistan or Iraq, at autocratic structures before the Arab Spring in Northern Africa or the Maidan in Ukraine. A common issue that links all those events is corruption. It does not need a mastermind to make the link between corruption, weak state institutions and instability. However, it too often needs persuasion to get acceptance for the message that corruption is not a minor internal issue, but a real threat to human rights and a threat to international peace and security.

Corruption has different faces. In instable environments it ranges from petty to grand corruption, from accepted custom to criminal activity. It hinders the positive impact external help seeks to achieve. Aid may even entrench corruption further and contribute to undesired outcomes. The international community has learned this the hard way in missions in Afghanistan, Kosovo or Mali.

The lessons nevertheless still have to be woven into all current and future operations. Twelve of the 15 lowest ranked countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2013 were the scene of insurgencies or extremist activities. Fighting corruption thus becomes a prerequisite for sustainable military support, security, and development.

Lack of monitoring and control of spending resources and accepting corruption as a fact of mission life not only contribute to state instability, it also endangers the lives of soldiers and civilian per-

sonnel. In fact, interventions often lead to a spike of corruption in the affected country – Afghanistan and Iraq are prime examples – and an increase in support for insurgents.

Even "lighter" approaches than military intervention, such as the example of capacity building in Mali, show the need to incorporate an institution-building component with the overall principle of "do no harm" – in other words, do not add to the already prevalent issues or delegitimize the mission through misconduct.

erability. Institutional weakness, corruption, factional fault lines and lack of management procedures within the recipient armed forces increase opportunities for diverting equipment and make it difficult to improve capacity and resilience.

With the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) entering into force in December 2014, now is the time for all parties to the treaty to ensure that their arms export control systems are as robust as possible. This demands strong anti-corruption mechanisms, which can easily be introduced into arms export systems.

Given the need for international coordination, organizations such as the European Union have an important role to play. Not only should the EU encourage further ATT ratification, participate



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What is needed is a more comprehensive strategic approach. If we really want to contribute to stable institutions – ideally, through prevention instead of intervention – then it is time to finally include anti-corruption as a cornerstone of risk analysis, planning, and mission mandates.

Furthermore, to be effective there needs to be a greater openness of civil society actors, the military and bureaucratic decision makers to work together. The private sector, of course, has a role to play as well, so that efforts are truly comprehensive.

Compliance and due diligence are especially important when defense capacity building involves arms transfers aimed at increasing the receiving armed forces' capacity and enhancing interop-

erability. In information sharing and help build capacity elsewhere, it also needs to tighten the EU Common Position on arms export controls and harmonize the various national systems to ensure that anti-corruption considerations are introduced and applied effectively.

While working on the issue of corruption and state fragility in 2014, Transparency Germany was able to benefit from a range of national and international actors that agreed with the need to increase our national and multilateral capacities in anti-corruption. The Munich Security Conference is one example and we hope this year's cooperation event on "Tackling state fragility and failure: the corruption dimension" will help to promote more widespread debate on these issues. ■



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