

**47<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee**  
**2-4 March 2010**

**Agenda item 5**

**Oral update on the High Commissioner's 2009 Dialogue on persons of concern in urban settings**

- This oral update covers the main outcomes of the third High Commissioner's Dialogue of 8-10 December 2009, focusing on persons of concern to UNHCR in urban settings, and proposed follow up. Information on all of the Dialogues can be accessed on UNHCR's website (<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a12a4a26.html>).
- The 2009 Dialogue included the following:
  - A half-day Roundtable of Mayors on the theme "humanitarian challenges in the context of urbanization" (8 December 2009).<sup>1</sup> It enabled Mayors from 15 cities, representatives of municipal administrations from six cities, and representatives of two networks of cities to exchange their experiences, identify specific challenges, and make suggestions on ways to address them.
  - Two-days of inter-active discussions (9-10 December 2009), consisting of plenary sessions, small break-out group discussions, and three side events.
- An Executive Summary consolidating the most significant findings, recommendations, examples of good practice, and suggestions for future action, will be made available shortly on UNHCR's website.
- UNHCR's experience with populations of concern in cities is not new. What is new is the recognition that, increasingly, cities are the main site of humanitarian response. Urbanization presents a number of challenges in terms of the laws, traditions and cultures of the populations of concern versus those of the host communities. The problems are also different in developed and developing countries. The protection needs of each population group are also unique and UNHCR's policies have to take that into account. But it is equally important to recognize that there are common principles involved. Key among them is the necessity of adopting a rights-based approach to the strategies, policies and measures that are devised.
- To discharge its mandate effectively, UNHCR is striving to improve its performance in urban settings and recalibrate its approach, with an enhanced focus on partnerships and paying particular attention to the role of local authorities. This is the objective of the Office's new policy on the subject – *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas* – which was issued in September 2009.
- The third Dialogue on Protection Challenges focused on how to create, deepen and expand protection space in cities for persons of concern to UNHCR. This includes emphasis on legal frameworks, national practices and the recognition of rights, where an enormous amount of advocacy remains to be done (e.g. encouraging the ratification of international instruments, the withdrawal of reservations and the establishment of national protection structures).

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR organized the roundtable in cooperation with The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration. The Mayor of Geneva, Mr. Rémy Pagani, and the United Nations High Commissioner, Mr. António Guterres, co-chaired the event, which took the form of an informal *tour de table* discussion. Mayor Pagani gave a report on the roundtable during the opening session of the Dialogue and a number of mayors participated actively throughout, including Mr. G. Majiwa, Mayor of Nairobi, who co-chaired one of four breakout sessions.

- Two observations were repeatedly highlighted. First, it is important to avoid building parallel structures for the provision of services and assistance, particularly in the areas of shelter, education and health. Secondly, effective burden-sharing is key to the process. Humanitarian and development actors must come together in a more meaningful way. While UNHCR is not a development actor, it does have a catalytic and advocacy role to play in helping to promote a development-oriented perspective among donor countries.
- The deliberations underscored the importance of the attitudes of local populations in combating xenophobia. They also emphasized the need to ensure adequate responses to unacceptable behaviours such as human trafficking, rape and other violations of human rights. While being tough on criminal activities is vital, it is equally important to become more effective in protecting the victims.
- Many participants commented on registration, documentation and the determination of refugee status. In these discussions, UNHCR highlighted that populations of concern, by nature, look out for their own interests. If, for example, they perceive a risk and no benefit in registering, they will not do so. It is therefore vital to ensure that these processes are perceived as being useful by those they are intended to benefit.
- Another issue discussed was protection space. An important aspect of protection space is access: access to information, access to safety nets and access to basic services, allowing refugees and displaced people to meet their essential needs, as well as access to self-reliance – training, job opportunities and micro-credit.
- UNHCR will be taking a number of steps in follow-up to the Dialogue:
  - Revise UNHCR’s urban refugee policy to take into account the dynamic debate during the Dialogue and the valuable points made by the participants.
  - Advocate jointly with the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, for an agreement among the broader humanitarian community on a common policy approach for non-camp, urban, internally displaced people.
  - Select five “pilot” cities where UNHCR will make a special effort to engage with partners in implementing the September 2009 policy.
  - Conduct real-time evaluations in such ‘pilot sites’ in order to identify good practice that can be applied during the broader roll-out of the policy in 2011.
  - Collect and share examples of good practice in cooperation with partners.
  - Following the roll-out phase, gradually mainstream the new urban refugee policy into UNHCR’s programmes, aiming to continuously improve the Office’s performance.

*UNHCR  
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