

## **UNHCR submission to the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness February 2011**

UNHCR is grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission to Australia's Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness, and the consultative manner in which the Australian Government has embarked on reviewing various policies and positions.

### **About UNHCR**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide.

Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people.

In more than five decades, the agency has helped an estimated 50 million people restart their lives. Today, a staff of around 6,000 people in 250 offices in 115 countries continues to help an estimated 17 million persons. About 85 per cent of its staff work in the field, 60 per cent of them in often difficult and dangerous non-family duty stations.

### **Multilateral Engagement**

UNHCR appreciates Australia's commitment to supporting multilateral organizations through funding and through engagement in policy-setting forums such as UNHCR's Executive Committee.

Particularly in the area of refugee issues, which by definition cross over national boundaries, the ability of multilateral organizations and forums to bring together regional and international actors to find solutions is vital.

UNHCR is grateful for the recognition of the Agency's work through the augmentation of both core and project funding from the Australian Government to UNHCR, which has grown to a total of over USD 40 million through AusAID last year.

In particular, core funding which is unearmarked allows the Agency to ensure that priority projects and operations are able to meet the needs of their beneficiaries and that we can also be flexible in meeting new and emerging challenges.

UNHCR also recognizes that donors such as Australia need to ensure that multilateral organizations, including UNHCR, need to demonstrate results for this funding. UNHCR's reform efforts, in particular those designed to implement results-based management practices and to ensure a more agile and effective delivery of assistance to people of concern to the Agency, are in line with what Australia aims to achieve.

### **Regional Focus**

Notwithstanding the vital role played by unearmarked funding, UNHCR recognizes that there will be regional imperatives in the direction of aid assistance by donors like Australia.

In the area of refugees and asylum-seekers there should be a continued focus on both peace-building and stabilization in source countries and training and institution-building in 'transit' countries through which asylum-seekers and refugees may be moving in search of protection. A strong protection component should be built into any capacity-building programmes.

UNHCR notes Australia's continued commitment to geographical diversity in its humanitarian resettlement programme, and this contributes to UNHCR's global work in finding durable solutions for the plight of refugees and displaced persons all around the world.

### **Sectoral Focus**

UNHCR considers the following five issues will impact humanitarian architecture in the coming years; (1) population growth, (2) urbanisation, (3) climate change, (4) food, water and energy insecurity and (5) immigration. All the issues are interlinked and becoming more complex, and driving insecurity and displacement.

As UNHCR has noted in previous submissions and policy commentary, the Agency believes that aid and assistance efforts, including programme design and its evaluation, to help beneficiaries can be further enhanced by incorporating commitments to fostering respect for and implementing the principles of international legal instruments relating to international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international refugee law, as well as the concept of human security. A 'rights-based' approach to aid delivery ensures that the selection of projects and activities, and the evaluation of their implementation and success, keeps the interests of beneficiaries firmly at the centre.

Focusing aid efforts on gender equality and marginalized or disadvantaged groups (including particularly vulnerable people such as children or those with disabilities) and the incorporation of a protection-based approach throughout Government policy-setting would be an important step forward in promoting critical issues of human security and humanitarian action.

This could be achieved, for example, by including explicit policy goals to meet the protection needs of vulnerable people; advocating for humanitarian access; and supporting measures to increase the number of protection officers in the field and develop more effective protection mechanisms and training processes.

While donors remain committed to bridging the gaps that persist between humanitarian, recovery, and longer-term development efforts, the challenge remains for the international community and partners to establish a common understanding for transition financing. The timely and strategic use of humanitarian aid is an extremely powerful tool for alleviating human suffering and promoting solutions, and further exploration of how such aid could be used as a platform for longer-term development would be welcome.

AusAID has an important opportunity to address this issue as it is responsible for both the humanitarian and development funding under the same institutional structure. Humanitarian action can be a very useful platform for transitional as well as longer-term development.

As countries move from states of emergency, involving humanitarian support, to longer term stability and development, donor states need to find more efficient, coherent and seamless ways of supporting states through these transitions. This requires close cooperation with countries affected, the multilateral agencies involved and, also, more coherent synergies within donor countries, themselves, between government agencies and with the broader civil society, including the non-governmental sector.

An example of humanitarian aid with longer-term benefits are the Australian-funded (through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship) 'population stabilization' projects in refugee source and transit countries. If designed strategically and in a complementary way with other initiatives, such projects not only provide immediate protection (ie: shelter), but also reduce the impetus for onward movement (thus taking pressure off possible humanitarian need later) in search of protection. This helps provide UNHCR with the humanitarian 'space' to find long-term durable solutions for those displaced people and can reduce pressure on 'destination' countries like Australia by helping displaced people find safety and security closer to their countries of origin.

This example also highlights the opportunities for AusAID and other Australian government agencies to better coordinate related projects to help could help address the complex interplay of factors (in source, transit and refuge countries) that compel the movement of displaced people around the region.

Similarly, a deeper the understanding among governments, individuals (tax payers), private sector (corporate social responsibility), academia, NGOs and foundations of the complexities surrounding humanitarian situations (whether natural disaster or



man-made), can contribute greater coherence and coordination in the responses of these various actors.

### **Conclusion**

UNHCR welcomes Australia's Review of Aid Effectiveness and the opportunity to provide the above comments on several of the terms of reference.

More information on the Agency can be found at [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org), and we would be happy to elaborate, through our Regional Office in Canberra, on the points we have made in this submission.

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