

## NGO Submission

### Agenda item 7(i) Targeting Development Assistance, including International Cooperation for Finding Durable Solutions For Protracted Refugee Situations

*Thank you, Mr. Chairman,*

#### ***Introduction***

NGOs commend UNHCR's emphasis on Targeting Development Assistance (TDA), and the initiatives various donor countries have taken in this area, as important contributions to the international protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. We strongly support initiatives that improve responsibility-sharing, build refugee protection capacities in developing countries and ensure that all refugees are able to find a durable solution. In this context, refugee participation is essential in ensuring that assistance is appropriate and meets refugees' needs.

In the run-up to the High-Level Working Group on Migration and Development in New York September 2006, NGOs would like to use this opportunity to emphasize TDA's relevance in accentuating the positive role of migration in development. The TDA, Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR), and Development through Local Integration (DLI) strands of Convention Plus have used development cooperation strategically to contribute to the resolution of longstanding refugee situations and to respect refugees' rights under the 1951 Convention and other human rights instruments, while awaiting durable solutions.

Despite more than a decade of dialogue, however, a large gap between humanitarian relief and development cooperation remains. Evidence of this are the nearly 8,000,000 people who remain in protracted refugee situations worldwide, where they are confined to camps or segregated settlements, or denied the right to work. These restrictions are particularly inconsistent with a coherent framework for refugee migration and development. Preventing these refugees from engaging in economic activity effectively wastes the energies and development potential of a labour force the size of a small country.

#### ***Rights-Based Approach***

Targeting Development Assistance for refugees will not fully leverage the synergies between migration and development, nor contribute to the resolution of protracted refugee situations, *unless* it is accompanied with a rights-based approach towards refugee protection in countries of asylum. Development actors and developing countries hosting refugees have increasingly recognised that policies conducive to economic growth and that ensure the effectiveness of aid must include basic civil liberties, the rule of law, and quality, non-prohibitive economic regulation. These policies should also grant refugees their full rights under the 1951 Convention, including the freedom of movement, the right to engage in livelihoods, and the

rights to work, to practice professions, to run businesses, to own property, and to choose one's own residence.

Theoretically, where states face real obstacles in granting refugees their full rights under the Convention, incremental improvements in standards over time may seem appropriate. In protracted situations, however, this rarely happens. Instead, international attention and interest tend to diminish, shifting towards new emergencies and conflicts. As a result of donor fatigue, fewer resources are available to support and sustain long-standing refugee camps. This has led to reductions in food rations, and refugees find themselves in increasingly dire circumstances, as international agencies struggle to maintain even minimal standards.

### ***Overcoming Political Impasse: Renewing Efforts to Facilitate Local Integration***

NGOs welcome UNHCR's recognition that refugees can be agents of development. Refugees have thrived economically in a range of contexts – and many have established businesses and initiatives that contributed not only to the economic development of their host countries, but also created employment for the local population. Examples include refugee enterprises in Eastleigh, Nairobi, which have in some cases resulted in the creation of employment opportunities for Kenyans. Allowing refugee employment in the agricultural sector has also been a success. In both Western Tanzania and Sudan, agricultural expansion or intensification occurred partially as a result of refugee labour. In the forest region of Guinea, Liberian refugees boosted rice production by increasing the cultivation of the lower swamp areas, which was common practice in Liberia but little known in Guinea. In Belize, Tanzania and Uganda, governments saw refugees as a means to develop underutilized land, an aim that was pursued by allocating land to refugees.<sup>1</sup>

It is time to be bold in our search for solutions. While donor states should make a significant contribution to improving refugee protection in developing countries (for example by providing funding, capacity building and resettlement opportunities), we urge refugee-hosting countries to find new willingness to reconsider the option of Local Integration. To realize the development potential of refugees, donor countries and refugee-hosting states need to meet each other halfway. It is not without reason that UNHCR identified *three* durable solutions: local integration, voluntary repatriation and resettlement. While many hail voluntary repatriation as the 'ideal' solution, protracted refugee situations will not be resolved based on return and resettlement alone. As NGOs, we regret that in large parts of the world, despite years of international dialogue to resolve protracted refugee situations, local integration is no more accessible to refugees today than it was five years ago.

We encourage practical approaches that target development not only to refugees, but include refugee host areas. Expanding local integration options in developing countries should not focus solely on refugees, but should also have tangible benefits for the local population.

### ***TDA: A Catalyst for Reintegration & Reconstruction***

The durable solution of 'return' is generally preceded by prolonged periods of camp confinement, characterized by dependency on humanitarian aid for survival, and by hopelessness. Under such circumstances, the voluntary nature of return is questionable. Moreover, voluntary return movements are initiated without adequate financial support. The 15,000 Angolans who may soon be repatriated from Zambia, without assistance for transport

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobsen (2001): "The forgotten solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries", UNHCR, EPAU: New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 45

and only food assistance for a journey of thousands of miles that could last for months,<sup>2</sup> is only one case in point. Other major voluntary repatriation operations, such as return to South Sudan where there are no facilities, are also constrained by serious funding problems. Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Liberia continue to struggle with very limited resources for return, rehabilitation and reintegration.<sup>3</sup> Premature return, and return without the necessary resources and guidance, are unsustainable, and threaten the safety, health and dignity of refugees.

We urge donors, states and UNHCR to use TDA to create adequate conditions for sustainable return. Such conditions include the creation of infrastructure and de-mining where relevant, as well as building refugee skills when they are in countries of asylum. By enabling refugees to realise their rights, durable solutions are more likely to take place. Recent research in Uganda showed that self-settled refugees were far better equipped to plan their return home than those settled in camps.

Given UNHCR's new responsibility to protect IDPs, we recommend that TDA be extended to include IDPs – who may be returning to the same areas as refugees – as well as those communities who stayed behind in countries of origin. One of the strengths of TDA in countries of asylum is its emphasis on the development of the refugee-hosting society, which creates positive relations between refugees and locals, and increases local capacity and willingness to host refugees. A similar approach in countries of origin would facilitate sustainable reintegration.

One task that remains is the identification of a strong and sensible mechanism for coordination that brings together Governments, international organisations (IGOs), and NGOs in joint humanitarian-development projects. Better coordination between humanitarian and development actors could enable, for example, the linking of vocational training in countries of asylum to those skills most needed in countries of origin. In this way, cooperation could ensure that refugees utilize their skills and are empowered to contribute to reconstruction processes.

*Thank you, Mr. Chairman.*

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<sup>2</sup> Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), 15<sup>th</sup> June 2006: "Angolan refugees might end up walking home, UNHCR warns".

<sup>3</sup> Keynote address by the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Africa. 29<sup>th</sup> May 2006 – 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2006, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso