



Written Testimony of:

Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

at a hearing on

**“The Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism and the Role of Foreign Assistance”**

before the

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## **Introduction**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before you today to speak about the global forced displacement crisis facing the international community, and the work of my agency- the UN Refugee Agency-in response. After serving 25 years in the U.S. Government, I took up the functions of Deputy High Commissioner at UNHCR in July of last year. My move to the agency coincided with the largest number of forcibly displaced in the world since World War II – over 60 million -- and ongoing crises in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa leading to record numbers of refugees landing on the shores of Europe.

UNHCR sincerely thanks the United States of America for its tremendous support and leadership in global humanitarian aid and protection. Americans care deeply about refugees, and the United States Government translates this compassion into strong diplomatic, moral, and financial engagement that enables our community of committed humanitarian aid workers to care for millions of uprooted people in need. Today’s hearing is a unique opportunity to bring attention to the displacement challenge and to explore the solutions necessary for global stability and the security of the United States of America.

My comprehensive written testimony addresses a range of issues related to forced displacement of millions of men, women, and children and key operations that concern us. I hope to leave you with three main messages:

- 1) Forced displacement is at an all-time high and will remain a challenge for all of us. The traditional responses - including humanitarian aid and refugee resettlement - need to be reinforced and complimented with vigorous and creative alternatives that can be pursued now. While aid is no substitute for concerted political leadership to resolve conflicts, in the absence of political solutions we need robust humanitarian and development responses, particularly in refugee-hosting countries that are currently buckling under the strain.
- 2) Current attacks on the refugee protection system, fueled in part by an unjustified link between refugees and terrorists, fail to recognize that refugees are the victims and not the perpetrators of violence and extremism. They share our values of freedom and tolerance and are persecuted for it. National security goals are in no way at odds with refugee protection, and UNHCR stands ready to help governments in developing protection-sensitive border management policies.
- 3) U.S. leadership is critical to maintaining global refugee protection and ultimately to resolving the crises that drive people from their homes.

## **The State of Global Displacement**

World attention to refugees and other people on the move has perhaps never been greater, due in large part to the situation in Europe. Yet, forced displacement is nothing new and has been steadily growing in recent years. Today, more than 60 million people are forcibly displaced around the world. Of these individual men, women, and children – all of whom have a story of loss and upheaval - some 20 million have crossed an international border and are therefore refugees, while the remaining 40 million are primarily those who are displaced within their own countries and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

If the uprooted formed a single country, it would be the world’s 24<sup>th</sup> largest. Last year, more than 42,000 people fled their homes every single day. At the same time, the number of refugees who were able to return home was at its lowest level in three decades.

How did we get to this place in history, where one in every 122 humans is uprooted? In one respect, the answer is simple: new conflicts emerge and the existing ones continue. In the last five years, at least 15 conflicts have erupted or reignited, covering virtually every region on the globe. Old conflicts drag on with no solutions in sight, while the media and public attention turn away. There is no doubt that the human and financial resources of UNHCR and our partners are stretched like never before in order to respond to the new crises while continuing to attend adequately to those in protracted displacement.

Over half of all refugees come from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. On the one hand, this gives us some hope, because resolving these crises would drastically reduce the number of the uprooted. Yet, these very countries demonstrate just how long people are forced from their home. In some parts of the world, individuals and families have spent more than two decades as refugees. In Kenya's sprawling settlement known as Dadaab refugee camps, a third generation of Somali refugee children has now been born.

The Syria conflict—now in its sixth year—clearly leads the current displacement crisis. With five million Syrian refugees and six and a half million internally displaced Syrians, we're at a point where one in five of the 60 million uprooted people is Syrian. Half of Syria's pre-war population is forcibly displaced. Turkey now hosts more refugees than any country in the world—with 2.7 million Syrians as well as Afghans and others. Lebanon is the largest per-capita refugee hosting country; one in four people in Lebanon is now a Syrian refugee.

Afghans remain the second largest refugee population, while Colombians comprise the second biggest population of IDPs. Other major uprooted populations are from Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic, Yemen, Burundi, Mali, Myanmar, and the list goes on.

Globally, women and children continue to comprise 80 percent of the uprooted, with more than half being children.

It's also important to note—and in fact to clarify—that while refugee camps still exist and are a favored visual image for the media, most refugees are not in camps. Rather, an estimated 63 percent of refugees globally, and 90 percent of Syrians, do not live in camps. Most refugees live in urban or semi-urban areas, in apartments or other accommodations. While this is positive in the sense that non-camp settings can often provide a more dignified and normal existence, the trend does generate specific protection challenges. Refugees living outside of camps are often at greater risk of discrimination, harassment, arrest, and even forced return to their home countries. Yet, UNHCR and our partners welcome the opportunity to increase our urban and other non-camp programming, while at the same time providing aid and protection to those who remain in camps.

### **Meeting the needs**

The international community has struggled to respond to the sharp growth in forced displacement and the resulting humanitarian needs. Never before has UNHCR had to manage its operations with such a gap between needs and funding available to address them. The humanitarian system is faced with a dilemma: while the numbers of people forcibly displaced across the world continue to rise, the funds available for humanitarian aid are not keeping up with the rapidly expanding needs. By the third quarter of 2015, some 33 UN appeals were only 42 percent funded. UNHCR's voluntary contributions stood at just 50 percent of its budget for 2015. By undertaking significant cost cutting measures - both early on and throughout the year - UNHCR was forced to make very difficult choices some a matter of life and death.

Our programs in Africa are at a breaking point with roughly 35% of the needs being met. The Mali Emergency Situation was funded at 16 percent (with a US\$ 93.3 million funding gap), the CAR Situation at 24 percent (with a US\$ 182.4 million gap), and the South Sudan Situation at 30 percent (with a funding gap of US\$ 544.1 million). Funding for programs in the Americas was at 25 percent (and a gap of US\$ 84 million), in Asia and the Pacific at 35 percent (a gap of US\$ 389 million), in Europe at 40 percent (a gap of US\$ 357 million), and in MENA at 58 percent (a gap of US\$ 907 million).

The financial strain is felt not only by UNHCR but also by our 930 international and national partners, including many U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

### **The link to Security**

Today's conflicts are increasingly complex, involving many actors. Many of these actors have no respect for humanitarian principles; the work of the humanitarian community has therefore become increasingly dangerous and difficult. In 2015, we had 196 security incidents. Staff and partners are highly exposed and, in order to mitigate these risks to the extent possible, we must carefully balance the number of staff at risk with the capacity needed to stay and deliver aid to people in need. We see this in our operations in Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan, among others. In locations where the humanitarian needs are often the most dire, armed actors use civilian populations not only as targets but as weapons of war. Today's conflicts may include national and foreign armies, ethnic or religious based militias, insurgent groups, and other non-state armed actors. These groups can cross international borders and affect the stability and security of neighboring countries or even entire regions.

We also see a multitude of mega-trends, which include climate change, natural disasters, extreme poverty, poor governance, food shortages, and energy crises—all converging. Two-thirds of the world's refugees are located in what my agency has referred to as an “arc of crisis” that stretches from southwest Asia through the Middle East to the Horn of Africa and the Lake Chad Basin. This is also an area in which populations are growing and heading to cities and where the impact of climate change is predicted to be severe. In addition, we're seeing violence in other parts of the world, such as the Northern Triangle of Central America, where multiple state and non-state armed criminal groups create complex humanitarian crises. Later in this testimony, I provide more detail on some of the crises that are spiking global displacement numbers and to which my agency and our partners are responding.

### **Maintaining Global Protection**

In this increasingly complex landscape, we are witnessing an unprecedented attack on the ability of uprooted individuals and families to find protection from harm. In some cases, particularly in industrialized countries, this attack takes the form of policies that prevent or discourage asylum seekers from accessing full and fair determination of their refugee claims. In other cases, we see the complete or partial closure of borders, making it nearly impossible for persons fleeing persecution and violence to find safety in neighboring countries. Inside the conflict zones themselves, the targeting of civilians and humanitarian workers, by many state and non-state actors, means that IDP protection is increasingly difficult.

A particularly troubling challenge to the institution of asylum arises from polarized political climates and the ensuing public debates. Not since the period preceding the Second World War have we witnessed such popular rejection of the notion of protecting refugees, as evidenced by hate crimes, hate speech, and xenophobia, often in the guise of what would otherwise be legitimate concerns over security. We would like to believe this involves only a vocal minority who are spreading hate. Within this climate, however,

it is all the more essential to ensure non-discriminatory access to quality asylum and protection. While providing for their own security, countries should not slam shut their borders to those who are themselves the victims of violence, persecution, and often terrorism, and who have no other means of finding safety.

In December 2015, UNHCR issued its updated note on Addressing Security Concerns without Undermining Refugee Protection, which I will provide for the record. This document recommends ways that governments can uphold both their security obligations and their commitments to persons fleeing persecution.

UNHCR shares the international community's concern that violent extremism can be conducive to terrorism and conflict. We also share the understanding of many governments and their people that refugees are those who have rejected this ideology, who are targeted because of this rejection, and who share the values of democracy, freedom, and tolerance.

Under international refugee law, individuals who have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, or serious non-political crimes—including terrorist offenses—are excluded from refugee status. Persons who may pose a security threat, such as combatants, are not entitled to refugee protection. Therefore, by definition, refugees are not terrorists. Yet in the public discourse and narrative in many parts of the world, legitimate security fears often are misdirected at the very people who share that fear and who have run from the common enemy, seeking protection.

On every continent, we are witnessing challenges to protection, often driven by security concerns, real or perceived, as well as domestic political agendas that are often unrelated to the presence of refugees. We call on the United States to uphold its longstanding leadership role in international refugee protection—consistent with the ideals on which the country was founded—by continuing to set an example of welcome to those who are among the most persecuted and most vulnerable in the world today.

An effective response to security threats will not come from measures to restrict the movement of refugees and further limit their access to protection. As recent events have shown, such efforts can have the unintended consequence of supporting the business of smugglers and human traffickers. In contrast, efforts to identify quickly those who are in need of protection, and to address their needs, are in line not only with international law- and the domestic laws of many countries including the United States- but also with the finest of humanitarian traditions. A component of such protection-sensitive border management is also the identification of those who are not in need of international protection and who may therefore be returned to their home countries.

This approach, marrying security and protection, recognizes that effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are complementary and mutually reinforcing goals. It is an approach adopted in a number of global initiatives, such as 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Plan of Action, and the 2016 UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

### **Maintaining the Civilian Nature of Humanitarian Action**

It is clear that our work with host countries and partners to assist refugees and other forcibly displaced persons is critical. Such assistance includes the provision of resources, services, and realistic prospects for the enjoyment of rights, such as education, health care, vocational training, and work opportunities. Such assistance anchors refugees within their larger communities and enables them to live with some modicum of stability, sense of purpose, and a belief in their futures.

Education is a key component of our support to refugees. The displacement of refugee youth disrupts their personal networks and education, and limits later employment opportunities. It places them at heightened risk of violence and exploitation. UNHCR works with government and NGO partners to address these issues. Most young refugees want the opportunity to contribute to their societies. UNHCR provides formal and non-formal education and vocational training, and strengthens livelihood opportunities for young people and their parents, so that families have the means to support themselves. This in turn reduces the incidents of child labor, early marriage, sexual violence, and recruitment by armed actors. When programs are provided to youth by both refugee and host societies, these young refugees are better connected and integrated into their communities. They are also empowered through programs aimed at team-building and leadership, positive communication skills, peaceful resolution of disputes, and tolerance.

To mitigate the risks of child recruitment, UNHCR also provides counseling to adolescent refugees and their families on the risks of such recruitment; works with border authorities to prevent the return of unaccompanied children; and conducts awareness-raising campaigns. UNHCR supports the creation of positive social media networks that provide an alternative to those tempted to participate in radicalized or extremist networks.

### **New Approaches to Forced Displacement**

The number of humanitarian crises, the levels of forced displacement, and the protracted nature of many of these situations has prompted deep reflection on the adequacy of the current humanitarian response and the prospects for peace, security, and sustainable development. We are witnessing unprecedented political attention to these issues and the opportunity for a sea change in how we address forced displacement. Grounded in last year's adoption of the sustainable development goals which challenge us to "leave no one behind," political leaders will find ways this year to better share international responsibility toward refugees, and in particular to mitigate the impact of sustained, large-scale movements of people on low and middle-income host countries. Governments are pledging concrete support to build the resilience of refugees and host communities alike - for example through their inclusion in development plans - and stronger linkages between humanitarian and development finance, planning, and programming. We strongly welcome these efforts in response to current global challenges.

High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and I are both in Washington this week to support efforts by the World Bank and other multilateral partners to increase development resources for key countries confronting forced displacement. This is a topic that I know is of great concern to this Subcommittee and subject of your personal leadership, Senators. These include countries that are both hosting large numbers of refugees and are geographically on the front lines of our collective security. Last week, several host countries, bilateral donors, UN agencies, international financial institutions, and NGOs committed to developing innovative financing instruments that better respond to forced displacement, including concessional financing and leveraging private sector resources through the Wilton Park principles. These partners agreed to establish a set of concrete proposals by the time of the World Humanitarian Summit to be held in Istanbul, Turkey next month.

Another effort is that of the UN High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, working with donor governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and others, to agree upon implementable actions as part of a "Grand Bargain" to improve the way that humanitarian aid is mobilized and delivered. UNHCR is intensively engaged in this effort, which aims for greater flexibility by donors, greater transparency by agencies, and greater efficiency and effectiveness in outcomes. Agreements in this process are also potential areas for commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit.

Further to the ministerial meeting UNHCR hosted with the Secretary General in March of this year. We are also working with governments and other partners to find new and creative avenues for refugees to find temporary and permanent legal protection. UNHCR is calling on governments to explore new ways for refugees to move legally and to access employment, without turning to smugglers and putting their lives at risk. These include not only greater use of resettlement, which is a critical, but option limited to the most vulnerable of refugees, but also family reunification, humanitarian admission, private sponsorship, and education and labor market access.

Countries pledged to increase resettlement and humanitarian admissions for Syrian refugees - bringing the total to date to more than 185,000 - in addition to other commitments to reform admission and provide financial support. In 2015 UNHCR made a record 135,000 referrals for resettlement but it is not enough. UNHCR estimates that at least ten percent of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries will need resettlement or other legal ways to move elsewhere before the end of 2018. Globally, UNHCR sought resettlement for refugees from more than 60 countries of origin in 2015; the highest numbers were from Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, and Myanmar. We applaud the United States' significant contributions towards resettlement both in the form of its own refugee admissions and encouraging other countries to increase their commitments. More than 30 additional countries currently offer resettlement or humanitarian admission.

These efforts will culminate in two major events this fall: a Global Compact on Responsibility Sharing for Refugees and Migrants on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September, and a Leaders Summit on Refugees to be hosted by the United States. The latter will seek firm and explicit commitments from governments to increase funding for UN humanitarian appeals, additional resettlement opportunities for refugees in need of this form of international protection, and concrete policy changes to increase the number of children in school and the number of legal employment opportunities for refugees in countries of asylum.

### **UNHCR's response to humanitarian emergencies**

As I mentioned previously, conflicts are becoming increasingly inter - connected even if they may play out in different regions of the world. Most of the Afghans, Iraqis, and Syrians who are arriving in Europe are coming from or through Turkey, the Middle East at large, or South West Asia. Africans arriving in Europe are originating from or transiting through West Africa and the Horn of Africa. These situations, and the flow towards the United States of asylum seekers and others from the Northern Triangle of Central America, demonstrate that is not possible to simply "turn off the tap" of forced migration by adopting one policy or closing borders. Resolving conflicts quickly and peacefully is the only real solution that will stop desperate families from fleeing and allow them to return to their homes.

The enormous and unprecedented influx to Europe has commanded our collective attention. However, I hope to underscore the plight of the displaced globally and remind you of other crises, such as the Nigeria situation, which only 12 months ago we were highlighting as the most compelling unfolding displacement emergency at that time. Other crises that have erupted or reignited since then - including Burundi, Yemen, South Sudan, Eritrea, and elsewhere - all require fundamental life-saving assistance and core protection interventions. These responses are often carried out under difficult and dangerous conditions, where the safety of our staff is routinely threatened and lives are sometimes lost.

## **Extremism and Conflict**

I will now briefly highlight the humanitarian needs and challenges in a number of situations where extremism is among the causes of conflict, and where international aid saves lives and brings long-lasting stability to regions in crisis.

## **Syria and its historic impact**

As mentioned previously, the conflict in Syria has forced half of its people from their homes. More than 4.8 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries, and estimates in 2015 reflected that nearly 13.5 million people within Syria were in need of humanitarian aid - nearly half of them internally displaced persons. These statistics do not do justice to the mind-numbing scale of the destruction in Syria and the countless lives affected permanently by the war and violence.

High Commissioner Grandi recently said “Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world.”

Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict face greater hurdles every day, and their ability to find safety is increasingly limited. International solidarity with the Syrian people is failing to match and reflect the size and severity of the humanitarian tragedy. Syria’s neighbors are carrying an enormous burden, hosting millions of refugees, and are increasingly managing their international borders. These restrictions are leaving thousands of vulnerable people stranded inside Syria, unable to leave the country.

European states, which once welcomed Syrians, are now bringing down the shutters as more refugees seek safety there. Meanwhile, refugees in countries neighboring Syria are more vulnerable than ever given reduced humanitarian aid and limited support to national and local systems. As a result, Syrians are taking to the sea to survive – embarking on dangerous journeys to Europe or resorting to dangerous options such as child labor, early marriage, or sexual exploitation.

In February, donors gathered in London and pledged over \$11 billion for the Syria response - \$5.8 billion for 2016 and an additional \$5.4 billion for needs to be met through 2020. At this point, with the exception of the United States and a small handful of other countries, pledges have not been followed by disbursement. We are increasingly concerned that humanitarian aid will again fall short of the needs faced by the refugees, internally displaced, and host countries - resulting in even greater displacement and desperation.

The Syrian emergency has strained UNHCR to unprecedented levels. Despite the generosity of host countries and donors, Syrian refugees are facing increasingly difficult living conditions, after more than five years in exile. Meanwhile, the host governments continue to face enormous political, economic and security pressures as a result of the conflict. In Jordan and Lebanon, 90 percent of the refugees live below the poverty line. UNHCR has continued to work closely with partners to address their protection and assistance needs, as well as those of the most vulnerable members of the host communities. In the neighboring countries, approximately 200 partners are working hand in hand in innovative ways to implement the 2016 \$4.5 billion Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. The plan’s key objectives are to provide protection and improve access to education, health, nutrition, shelter, sanitation, jobs, legal assistance, and other critical services. The plan is only seven percent funded and we are already in April. International solidarity is clearly needed to ensure that these host countries can continue to welcome refugees while at the same time meeting the needs of their own populations.



Inside Syria, the humanitarian situation and level of human suffering endured by the Syrian people dramatically worsened in 2015. Safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access in the country remains a significant challenge. As mentioned previously, in 2015 a total of 13.5 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, including 4.5 million in hard-to-reach locations. UNHCR continued to use all possible means to reach the internally displaced and others in need, working across conflict lines and borders, as authorized under United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Some 3.2 million people were provided with core relief items, including nearly 430,000 persons in more than 30 hard-to-reach locations and 469,000 through cross-border operations. In 2016, UNHCR will continue to take the lead in the protection, shelter, non-food items, and camp coordination and camp management sectors. Since the beginning of this year, inter-agency convoys reached nearly 500,000 people in besieged, hard-to-reach and priority cross-line areas in Syria (i.e., 210,000 in besieged locations, 236,925 in hard-to-reach locations and 50,000 in priority cross-line areas).

Based on approvals received to date, the UN and partners are currently working to deliver assistance before the end of April to 811,000 people (cumulative) in 31 hard-to-reach, besieged and other priority locations across conflict lines with acute needs. On 27 March, UNHCR delivered core relief items to 13,000 individuals/2,600 families in the hard-to-reach Suqaylabiyah in Hama Governorate.

## **Iraq**

While Iraq continues to host nearly a quarter of a million Syrian refugees - most of them in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq - the humanitarian situation in Iraq itself continues to deteriorate. As a result, Iraqis are fleeing horrendous violence. The escalation of armed conflict across the central governorates of Iraq and the constantly changing security situation has resulted in 10 million people needing humanitarian assistance. The total figure of internally displaced Iraqis now stands at nearly four million, of whom over three million have been displaced since January 2014. Newly displaced Iraqis continue to arrive in overcrowded camps and temporary settlements. The displaced also face exposure to violence, restrictions on freedom of movement, forced encampment, and constrained access to basic services. UNHCR's ability to access those in need of assistance remains limited by the volatile security situation.

Along with the internally displaced, more than 230,000 Iraqis are registered as refugees throughout the region. Of the top ten nationalities arriving in Europe as of January 2016, some 14 percent were Iraqi.

## **Yemen**

The humanitarian situation in Yemen is dramatic and increasingly constrained by the prolonged lack of access, made worse by continued airstrikes, ground fighting across the country, and a lack of basic goods. The humanitarian community has launched the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan to provide critical and lifesaving assistance to 13.6 million people across the country.

An estimated 82 percent of the population of Yemen requires some level of humanitarian assistance. Due to the escalated conflict, some 176,000 persons have fled to Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan (as of 4 April). Of those, 48 percent are Third Country Nationals and national returnees, 35 percent are Yemenis and 17 percent are Somalis who had been recognized as refugees on a prima facie basis in Yemen. Among the Somalis who had returned to Somalia, some moved to other countries in the region, notably Djibouti and Ethiopia, where they are hosted as refugees, or have returned to Yemen.

UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration have jointly developed a Yemen Situation Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for 2016, which covers the requirements for providing protection and assistance to persons fleeing Yemen into the Horn of Africa.

Yemenis often arrive in other countries after many hours or days on the move. They are exhausted after the sea journey and are in urgent need of food, water, shelter, and emergency healthcare. UNHCR and partners provide basic assistance and support a coordinated approach in the region to identify persons in need of protection.

## **Somalia**

Terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab persists in Somalia, and confrontations between Al-Shabaab and the African Union Peacekeeping Force (AMISOM) continue to generate internal displacement. Humanitarian access is still limited due to the volatile security situation.

Despite the renewed efforts by humanitarian and development actors, reintegration in southern Somalia is challenging. UNHCR and partners are working with the international community and Somali authorities to improve socio-economic conditions inside the country, as well as actively pursuing durable solutions for refugees, returnees, and IDPs. While 1.1 million people are displaced within Somalia, nearly a million registered Somali refugees are in Kenya, Yemen, Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, and Tanzania. Vulnerable Somalis fleeing violence and terror set out on the treacherous and dangerous journey for safety and protection – in many cases arriving in countries that are experiencing conflicts of their own.

In October 2015, UNHCR and the European Union launched an integrated action plan for sustainable return and reintegration of Somali refugees from Kenya. Representatives from more than 40 countries and organizations pledged \$105 million to support Somali refugees and help them to voluntarily return in safety and dignity. Over 12,000 Somalis have returned home since late 2014, with more than 6,000 so far in 2016 alone. Insecurity and lack of services in the areas of origin of refugees continue to be the key obstacles to large-scale returns.

## **Nigeria**

Violence in northern Nigeria and across the Lake Chad Basin by Boko Haram and other armed groups has intensified since 2015. Currently, more than 2.2 million Nigerians are internally displaced and over 210,000 Nigerians are refugees in the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The conflict also triggered internal displacement in border areas of neighboring countries. Many have fled widespread and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and the spillover of terror and economic instability is magnifying the refugee crisis.

UNHCR's 2015 operations for Nigeria strived to provide protection, maintain humanitarian assistance, improve access to basic services, support self-reliance, and promote peaceful coexistence and environmental protection. The 2016 Nigeria response plan aims to provide protection and assistance to Nigerian IDPs, refugees, and members of impacted host communities. Among other goals, we seek to further the protection of particularly vulnerable populations and to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR continues to battle key challenges to our Nigeria operation and is working diligently to maneuver issues with logistical constraints, insecurity, restricted movement, and a lack of public services and infrastructure.

## **Afghanistan**

With 31 out of the 34 provinces inside Afghanistan affected by conflict today, the level of new displacement is the highest it has been in recent years. The number of those internally displaced increased from roughly 800,000 in 2014 to nearly 1.2 million in 2015. In addition, it is expected that in 2016, due to the ongoing conflict and worsening insecurity, an estimated 500,000 people could be displaced.

The situation in Afghanistan remains highly complex: the continued deterioration of security has led to sharp increases in displacement, suffering and deprivation. Many refugees who voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan claimed to have returned largely because of the situation in Pakistan, which has seen an increase in displacement within its own population. Afghanistan continues to host some 200,000 refugees from Pakistan's North Waziristan, many of whom have fled insurgency groups or counter insurgency efforts.

The Afghan Government has made a strong commitment to support the return and reintegration of refugees from Pakistan and Iran. UNHCR seeks to facilitate voluntary repatriation and reintegration into Afghanistan, as well as to pursue community-based, solutions-oriented interventions for the most vulnerable refugees. Despite the conditions, Afghans still would like to return home. Between January and August 2015, more than 50,000 refugees repatriated to Afghanistan (although harsh winter weather limited returns for the remainder of the year). However, the protracted conflict will continue to increase the number of internally displaced individuals throughout the country. In 2016, UNHCR is working with the Afghan government to implement the national IDP policy and to lead the inter-agency protection and shelter response efforts, with an aim to find lasting solutions for these populations. Critical funding shortages are leading to protection gaps and fewer returns.

Providing assistance to areas experiencing violence is key to maintaining and enhancing stability, which will allow families to access safe shelter, food, and health care; this in turn will create the opportunity for children to attend school and create a better future for themselves.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges facing the world today, resulting in a historic number of people on the move, underscore the importance of the principles of international refugee protection and international human rights and humanitarian law to keep people safe.

At a time when many countries are implementing restrictive measures designed to make refugees seek safety elsewhere, and when intolerance, discrimination, and xenophobia are on the rise in much of the developed world, we are reminded of the central importance of fundamental human values in our work and our advocacy. The main principles of refugee protection, of compassion for the persecuted stranger, are deeply anchored in all of the world's major religions and cultures. This is a rich source of common understanding that we must draw on, expand, and promote through everything we do.

In our efforts to protect the people for whom we care, strength lies in these common human values – tolerance, compassion, humanity, and respect for human rights. We must avoid language that equates the international obligation to protect refugees with creating safe haven for terrorists. UNHCR and the international community remain dedicated to ensuring that refugee protection law and practice benefit the victims of persecution, and not those who would do us, or refugees, harm. Failure to distinguish in our

words, between refugees and terrorists, can foster fear, hatred, and discrimination against all members of a particular race, nationality, or religion.

Consistent with its founding, its history, and its status as a global leader, the United States can continue to serve as an example in reversing this trend.

Again, UNHCR thanks this Subcommittee and applauds the leadership of the Senators who comprise it for your interest in tackling these fundamental issues. We stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Thank you.

Contact: Jana Mason  
Senior Advisor for U.S. Government Relations & External Affairs  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Regional Office Washington  
[mason@unhcr.org](mailto:mason@unhcr.org) / 202-296-5191