



UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Presidential Conference

20 June 2013

The global asylum, refugee and internally displaced current situation

Your Excellency Mrs. Vice-President, Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

I think that there is no better way to start this presentation then by telling you that during the 5 hours and 45 minutes of this conference today, from 9.30 am to 3.15 pm, 5048 persons will have become refugees or internally displaced. This represents 1 person deciding to leave everything behind to escape war, persecution or terror and thus becoming a refugee or an internally displaced person for every 4.1 seconds.

There are currently around 45 Million people in situations of displacement around the world among which there are 15,4 million refugees, 937,000 asylum seekers and over 28 million persons who have fled within their own borders. Over 46 % of refugees are children below 18 years of age and in 2012 alone, a record 21,300 applications for asylum were submitted by unaccompanied or separated children. The challenges to provide education to all these children in order for them not to miss out on their formative years are immense.

And although the Syrian refugee crisis is on everybody's mind these days, the one country that has been the top most refugee producing country for a straight 32 years is Afghanistan. Afghans constitute still the biggest refugee population ever with Pakistan hosting 1.9 million refugees and Iran hosting 868 000 Afghan refugees and this for three decades. Furthermore there are over 500,000 Afghans who are internally displaced within their own country.

Somalia, which has as well a long standing protracted refugee population, has been the second largest refugee producing nation in 2012 with a total of 1 million refugees having for the most part sought refuge in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Uganda and Djibouti.

Presidential Conference 20th June. Presentation.

The situation in Iraq is far from resolved if we take into consideration that there are still over 740 000 Iraqi refugees around the world.

To that you have to add smaller but yet significant refugee crisis caused by conflicts such as those of South Sudan, Mali, Ivory Coast, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

And then we have Syria. As I said earlier, although the Syrian crisis is on everybody's mind these days, it is mostly seen as a war, a political crisis. It is that without a doubt but it is more, it is a humanitarian tragedy. This is the fastest refugee situation in recent memories, with over 1,658,000 refugees. 1 million of them have become refugees since this January alone and the rate increase by 8000 persons every single day. UNHCR estimates that if no positive change occurs in the current situation, the projected Syrian refugee population will reach 3,4 million by December 2013. In addition there are currently over 3,6 million Syrians that are internally displaced and again if nothing changes on the ground by the end of the year that number could reach up to 6 million internally displaced in Syria that would be in dire need of international humanitarian assistance.

At the current time these Syrian refugees are mostly seeking refuge in the neighboring countries to Syria. Over 500,000 have gone to Lebanon, a country with a population of just 4.5 million people. Over 479,000 have gone to Jordan, 380,000 to Turkey, 159,000 to Iraq and 81,000 to Egypt. All those countries have shown a generosity and a hospitality which goes beyond words. Their response to this humanitarian crisis has been tremendous and the local population has embraced the refugees as their own despite the huge burden that such staggering numbers represent.

In addition to the Syrian nationals fleeing their country, you have an even more vulnerable population, if it was at all possible, that of the 80,000 Palestinians that had refugee status in Syria and who are now obliged to flee a second time and go through the trauma of an additional exile.

All these figures which are difficult to comprehend hide the fact that we are not talking of just statistics but of human beings, of human lives that are being shattered, of hopes, dreams and livelihood that are destroyed, of hard work and its legacy being blown away, of persons seeing loved ones being tortured, wounded, killed, disappearing, of families members being separated, of children losing their parents and parents losing their children. A UN report mentioned on 12 June that 93,000 civilians had been killed since the conflict started, among Presidential Conference 20th June. Presentation.

which over 1700 children, accidental or direct victims of war. It should not be forgotten either that women or children are overwhelmingly represented as refugees. Among the Syrian refugees, ¾ of them are women and children, who have to cope with the separation from their fathers and husband and survive in extremely difficult conditions.

In order to try and cope with this incredible crisis, the UN has made the biggest ever funding appeal for 5 Billion US dollars. If this appeal is fully funded, it should be sufficient to cover the needs until the end of the year.

Some of those Syrian refugees have moved further to try and seek asylum and protection. Some have reached Bulgaria. This year a total of 571 Syrians have entered Bulgaria and have applied for asylum. Of those, 233 have up to now obtained Humanitarian Status and can finally concentrate on rebuilding their lives in a peaceful and secure environment.

This picture of the global refugee's situation may be demoralizing but there are positive stories that can be told. In 2012, for some 2,7 million refugees and Internally displaced persons, the possibility to return home in safety and dignity became a joyful reality.

Furthermore close to 75 000 refugees were submitted by UNHCR for resettlement to the countries of resettlement who steadfastly, year after year are showing solidarity and responsibility sharing by accepting recognized refugees who, for many reasons, are not able to remain in their country of first asylum.

Finally, despite the repeated crisis, the fact that UNHCR and all its partners are able to ensure the protection and the assistance of up to 45 million persons of concern is a testimony to international solidarity of donor governments, of private sector donors and of individual donors.

I cannot end my presentation to you without inviting all you to attend, if you have not already done so yesterday, the UNHCR "Sanctuary and Sustenance" multimedia projection taking place at the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library today and tomorrow night from 9.30pm onwards.

It is a show definitively well worth watching. It tells the journey of refugees from the events that led them to displacement, to reaching the sanctuary of asylum and then the process of

rebuilding their lives in a new country to which they can contribute by their knowledge, their skill and their talent.

I thank you for your attention.