

World marks World Refugee Day on June 20 to highlight the real needs of real people

ISLAMABAD, 19 June 2009 – The UN refugee agency, world communities and refugees across the globe will commemorate World Refugee Day tomorrow (June 20) to pay tribute to the millions of uprooted people struggling to survive against the odds.

This year, the day is marked under the theme “real people, real needs” to highlight the unmet needs of refugees around the world. Despite the efforts of many, including UNHCR, the needs of the world’s uprooted people are far from being met.

UNHCR’s Representative in Pakistan Ms Guenet Guebre-Christo said this year’s World Refugee Day is significant in Pakistan as it marks three decades of generosity hosting Afghan refugees at a time when the country is also coping with more than 2 million Pakistanis uprooted by conflict in the north west of the country.

“No loss is greater than losing one’s home and loved ones. We commemorate World Refugee Day to express our determination to help people who have fled their homes and to draw attention to the world’s displaced people who personify hope and courage,” said Ms. Guebre-Christos.

According to new statistics issued by UNHCR this week, the number of uprooted persons worldwide stood at 42 million at the end of last year. This total includes 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million internally displaced people uprooted within their own countries. The report indicates that 80 percent of the world’s refugees and a vast majority of internally displaced persons are in developing nations. Of the global total of uprooted people, UNHCR cares for 25 million, including a record 14.4 million IDPs – up from 13.7 million in 2007 -- and 10.5 million refugees.

In his World Refugee Day message, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Mr. António Guterres has said that “World Refugee Day is a good time to remember the 42 million uprooted people around the world who are still waiting to go home. They are among the most vulnerable people on Earth and they must be a priority.”

“In 2009, we have already seen substantial new displacements, namely in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia. While some displacements may be short-lived, others can take years and even decades to resolve,” said Guterres. He called upon the international community to “feel an obligation to rescue people in desperate need.”

In Pakistan, around 1.7 million registered Afghan refugees remain in the country, although almost 3.5 million have returned home since 2002 with UNHCR assistance. The highest numbers (1.6 million) returned in 2002 and the assisted

voluntary repatriation programme has continued since then. So far in 2009, since April, more than 38,000 Afghans have returned home with UNHCR's assistance. Of those remaining in Pakistan, forty-five percent of registered Afghans live in 84 refugee villages with the remaining living in urban settlements. Sixty-four percent of Afghans live in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and 21 percent live in Balochistan. Smaller numbers live in other parts of Pakistan.

In addition, UNHCR is assisting hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Pakistanis in NWFP as part of a joint UN response. UNHCR is providing shelter to those in need, and has helped to established camps where some 260,000 people are currently living. The agency is also providing other relief items like sleeping mats, kitchen sets, and mosquito nets to people staying in camps and those staying with friends, relatives or with host families.

Around the world, UNHCR is marking World Refugee Day in different ways – including film screenings, photography exhibitions, lectures, panel discussions, food bazaars, fashion shows, cultural performances and sporting contests. There will also be quizzes, drawing and essay-writing competitions, tree planting, seminars, workshops, speeches, and poetry recitals.

In Quetta, young Afghan students from 42 Afghan community run schools helped by UNCHR are taking part in an inter-school painting competition to mark World Refugee Day. UNHCR plans to make the best painting will be made into a poster.

More information about World Refugee Day is available at www.unhcr.org

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