



UNHCR Contribution to the

OSCE Chairmanship Workshop on Post Conflict Rehabilitation
Workshop: Stabilization, Reconstruction and Peacebuilding
2-3 May 2011

In the context of this workshop, UNHCR would like to highlight the nexus between post-conflict rehabilitation on the one hand and displacement and return and reintegration of displaced populations on the other.

UNHCR is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of and durable solutions for refugees and, under certain circumstances, of internally displaced populations. UNHCR, through Executive Committee and UN General Assembly decisions, is also called upon to get involved with returnees and people who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed.

When helping to reintegrate persons of UNHCR concern, we thereby also avert the recurrence of refugee-producing situations.

By virtue of our activities on behalf of refugees and displaced people, UNHCR also endeavours to promote the purpose and principles of the United Nations Charter: maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Resolving displacement - and preventing future displacement - is inextricably linked with conflict resolution and achieving lasting peace. On the one hand, unresolved problems of displacement may cause instability and thus threaten peace processes as well as peace-building efforts. On the other hand, durable solutions, particularly return, cannot be achieved as long as there is a lack of security; property is not restored; and conditions for sustainable solutions - including reconciliation between local communities and returnees, post-conflict reconstruction and the re-establishment of the rule of law and a legitimate government - are not in place.

Moreover, the presence of refugees may be politically sensitive. Return and reintegration processes risk being politicized, especially when censuses, elections or referendum processes are imminent, or where governments or international actors promote early return in order to demonstrate the success of a peace process. The issue of stateless people can also be politically contentious, often involving complex issues of national identity and minority rights.

Return of refugees and IDPs is increasingly taking place to regions and countries where the causes of flight have not been entirely eliminated or in absence of stable peace settlements. Often repatriation movements are large scale and take place under certain pressure. The manner and rate of return can either destabilize or facilitate the peace-building process thus, in turn influencing the reintegration process.

Sustainable return is much dependent on the quality and capacity of national protection. In some cases the state is unable or unwilling to extend full national protection to all of its citizens following violent conflict, particular to citizens in a national minority situation.

Solutions to displacement are usually based on negotiated agreements with and among governments with international, political, humanitarian and sometimes military involvement.

OSCE commitments are based on international and humanitarian law and related obligations, including refugee law. UNHCR is essentially dependent on other multi-lateral players, including regional organizations such as the OSCE, for meeting our protection goals and responsibilities.

Allow me to give you one example: just as successful peace-building is dependent on effective reintegration of refugees and IDPs, so too is national protection dependent on a well-functioning state and civil society, the latter being a traditional working area of the OSCE.

As we have heard in Ms. Cheng-Hopkins' keynote address, post-conflict situations have a high potential to trigger new conflict. Addressing post-conflict scenarios with a comprehensive security approach is therefore likely also to contribute to crisis prevention.

UNHCR works in a number of post-conflict situations in the OSCE region. We do this, mainly with view to support re-integration of returnees, confidence-building and reconciliation, to build national capacities, monitor and guide the international community on international protection needs and, at the same time, to plan for eventual future contingencies. A recent example of formalized international co-operation among UNHCR, the OSCE and the EU in a post-conflict scenario is the joint effort to support governments to close the displacement chapter in the Balkans.

Given the enormity of post-conflict challenges - just think about the physical and economic damage, lack of housing and infrastructure as well as of public and social services, militarized societies, and the persistence of hate and violence - it is imperative that solutions and the (re-)integration of displaced communities are treated as an integral element of the broader peace-building process. The relationship between reconstruction, reconciliation and reintegration is critical and these areas are to a large extent interdependent.

To tackle these post-conflict challenges effectively, solid partnerships among political, humanitarian and developmental players are needed. Bearing in mind the extensive field presence of UNHCR and the OSCE in post-conflict areas, as well as the OSCE's comprehensive security approach and its important work at all stages of the conflict cycle, strategic and practical co-operation between the UNHCR and the OSCE seems an imperative and reflective of a range of political OSCE decisions seeking to strengthen co-operation between the OSCE and the various United Nations bodies and agencies.

At the 2001 Bucharest Ministerial Council, OSCE participating States pledged to “explore strengthened OSCE potential for contributing to durable solutions, supporting and closely co-operating with other relevant organizations, primarily the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”. We are pleased that OSCE and UNHCR teams are working together in so many locations. But we will be even more pleased when this is no longer necessary.

One concrete suggestion: This year, UNHCR commemorates the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. We think that it is a fitting occasion for states to demonstrate that they are able to bring an end to some long-standing refugee and displacement problems. We also hope for continuing and strong political OSCE support and co-operation in this process.

In conclusion, UNHCR stands ready to offer its expertise and contribute to the work of the Lithuanian and future OSCE Chairmanships, participating States and OSCE Institutions, to strengthen the conceptual and practical link between facilitating protection and bringing solutions to displacement on the one hand (UNHCR), and managing effectively the post-conflict stage on the other hand (OSCE), thus contributing to the prevention of a relapse of conflict and more forced displacement.

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