



# WORLD REFUGEE DAY

20 June 2008

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## Special Report on the occasion of the World Refugee Day 2008

■ On June 20, we celebrate World Refugee Day. This year, events around the world will focus on the fundamental need for protection. For some, this means economic security; for others, protection is freedom from violence and persecution. On World Refugee Day, we will turn our attention to the millions of refugees who live without material, social and legal protection. Since its foundation in 1951, UNHCR has protected tens of millions of refugees. For us, protection consists of tangible improvements in the lives of forcibly displaced people – from the provision of food and shelter to support for those lacking legal status or those wishing to return to their home countries. On World Refugee Day, we commemorate this vital engagement. Protection is also about raising awareness. We cannot protect refugees if their plight remains invisible. On World Refugee Day, we will highlight the universal nature of protection. Not only are refugees protected all around the globe, but the responsibility for protection is equally global. Ultimately, protection is a challenge that knows no borders. Neither can it be left to a single agency to provide. On World Refugee Day, we are launching a global call for action. We want to promote engagement at the grassroots level, in local communities, workplaces and online. Only through a global network of supporters can we meet the manifold needs of protection.

### World Refugee Day: Displacement in the 21st Century

■ The refugee challenge in the 21st century is changing rapidly. People are forced to flee their homes for increasingly complicated and interlinked reasons. Some 40 million people worldwide are already uprooted by violence and persecution, and it is likely that the future will see more people on the run as a growing number of push factors compound one another to create conditions for further forced displacement.

■ Today people do not just flee persecution and war but also injustice, exclusion, environmental pressures, competition for scarce resources and all the miserable human consequences of dysfunctional states. The task facing the international community in this new environment is to find ways to unlock the potential of refugees who have so much to offer if they are given the opportunity to regain control over their lives.

■ There are three ways we at the UN Refugee Agency are making this goal a reality: we protect, we build and we advocate. First, we protect refugee rights to safety, shelter and health, focusing special attention on the most vulnerable people, particularly women and girls. Second, we work with our partners to build the capacity of refugees to fend for themselves once they are able to do so. And we work hard to find solutions so that refugees become self-sufficient as soon as possible. Third, we advocate to draw attention to the plight of refugees and to raise the money necessary to get the job done. Our goal is to persuade people that it is our common responsibility to make a difference for those forced to pick-up and go through no fault of their own. Results on the ground show we are making progress. Last year, we helped hundreds of thousands of people return home. In Africa, bright spots include stepped-up repatriation to South Sudan and winding up of UNHCR's operations in Liberia and Angola. In April, we held a major conference in Geneva and mobilized international support for the millions fleeing conflict in Iraq. We cannot do this alone. But with your support UNHCR can begin to turn the tide, giving refugees hope for the future and new opportunities for their families and their communities.