

UNHCR and Cities Alliance

Initial Joint Working Programme

Background

The Cities Alliance (CA) is a global coalition of cities and their development partners committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction. The Alliance brings cities together in a direct dialogue with bilateral and multilateral agencies and financial institutions.

The Alliance provides matching grants in support of:

- City development strategies (CDS) which link the process by which local stakeholders define their vision for their city and its economic growth, environmental and poverty reduction objectives, with clear priorities for actions and investments;
- Citywide and nationwide slum upgrading in accordance with the Alliance's Cities Without Slums action plan (MDG Target 11), including promoting secure tenure, access to shelter finance and policies to help cities prevent the growth of new slums; and
- Sustainable financing strategies for cities to attract the long-term capital investments needed for infrastructure, including improving accountability for service delivery and demonstrating stable revenue streams to more effectively leverage domestic capital.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country.

In more than five decades, the agency has helped an estimated 50 million people restart their lives. Today, a staff of around 6,300 people in more than 110 countries continues to help 32.9 million persons.

Summary of Discussions

As a part of UNHCR's to identify potential partnerships with development actors, and in light of the increasing importance UNHCR gives to displacement in urban settings, a number of exchanges took place in 2008 with the Secretariat of the Cities Alliance. This culminated in a Mission to Washington in October 2008. The importance of these issues was re-emphasised at the December Dialogue on Protection Challenges in Geneva, which also highlighted the implications of the urbanization of refugee populations. Increasing numbers of refugees are now found in urban settings, often without effective support or legal status.

Careful attention will need to be paid to the nature of humanitarian responses to urban emergencies. These will certainly become more common, because of rapid urbanization (especially in Africa), the likelihood of urban conflicts, and the danger that large cities in low-lying areas will become the locus of emergencies associated with rising sea levels and climate change. Humanitarian relief to IDP populations, after the first year or so of displacement, may need to be reconceptualised as urban assistance programmes, facilitating the provision of shelter and services.

Way Forward

After a brief presentation in regards to UNHCR's issues related to displacement in urban settings, and an introduction on the functioning of the Cities Alliance, the following action points were agreed:

- The CA suggested to jointly finance and commission a policy document, building from existing and ongoing UNHCR research on the issue, that (i) tries to obtain an accurate picture on the size of the urban refugee/IDP challenge; (ii) identifies different categories, for a range of possible policy responses, (iii) identifies current practices in dealing with urban refugees/IDPs, and the effects of these policies and (iv) highlights the key policy issues that need to be addressed. This should be undertaken with interested CA members. With this policy document, the CA could evaluate the implications of the issue and judge what role the CA can or should play. This could be complementary to the work being undertaken by UNHCR for the 2009 HC Dialogue;
- UNHCR to participate at the Annual meeting of the Cities Alliance members on 21-23 of January, and to make a short presentation of 10-15 minutes during the meeting soliciting CA members support for the joint research noted above. In advance of the meeting, UNHCR would prepare a concept paper on the project, including a summary of the UNHCR policy on urban refugees and the rationale for the project. This will be circulated in January 2009, prior to the CG meeting;
- UNHCR could consider becoming a member of the alliance either as an associate member without fee (for up to two years) or as a full member with a special UN fee of \$100,000 to be complemented with technical or other forms of in kind support. UNHCR could also become an observer for a period of one year prior to joining the Alliance. A decision could be made after UNHCR's participation at the Cities Alliance annual meeting in Barcelona in January 2009; and
- Provide the CA with additional inputs and information on specific data and research undertaken in regards to specific urban refugee and IDP situations. (eg, Nairobi study, Cairo updates, etc). This could be used by the CA to influence policy makers on issues related to eradication of poverty and access to social and legal services by displaced populations in cities.

The Proposed Joint Working Programme between UNHCR and the Cities Alliance will be discussed as part of the Agenda item dealing with the FY09-11 Work Programme. UNHCR will be represented by Assistant High Commissioner Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins.