

Australian Intervention UNHCR Executive Committee -- October 2006 AGENDA ITEM 5(a) International Protection

- MR CHAIRMAN, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE ASSISTANT HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HER CHALLENGING AND THOUGHT PROVOKING ADDRESS ON PROTECTION ISSUES
- I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION FOR ITS INNOVATIVE NEW PUBLICATION "MEASURING PROTECTION BY NUMBERS"
- A QUICK SCAN OF THIS PUBLICATION SHOWS THAT IT HAS SUCCINCTLY PUT TOGETHER A WEALTH OF USEFUL INFORMATION THAT IS OTHERWISE LOCATED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF PLACES
- WE WILL LOOK VERY CLOSELY AT THIS DOCUMENT AND PROVIDE OUR COMMENTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
- MR CHAIRMAN, AUSTRALIA STRONGLY WELCOMES THE TWO CONCLUSIONS BEFORE THIS YEAR'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.
- WE PARTICULARLY WELCOME THE CONCLUSION ON WOMEN AND GIRLS AT RISK AS BEING AN OVERDUE TREATMENT OF THIS ISSUE
- WOMEN AND CHILDREN COMPRISE A VERY LARGE PROPORTION OF PEOPLE IN CAMPS UNDER UNHCR'S MANAGEMENT AND ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO A VARIETY OF ABUSIVE AND EXPLOITATIVE PRACTICES
- THIS CONCLUSION SHOULD BE A PLATFORM FOR PRACTICAL ACTION BY UNHCR AND STATES TO ENSURE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PHYSICAL PROTECTION OF THIS GROUP.
- WE NOTE THAT THE CONCLUSION IDENTIFIES SPECIALISED RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS AS ONE TOOL THAT CAN DEAL WITH THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF SOME REFUGEE WOMEN AT RISK
- AUSTRALIA HAS OPERATED A DEDICATED WOMEN AT RISK PROGRAMME SINCE 1989 AS PART OF OUR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME.
- SINCE ITS COMMENCEMENT WE HAVE RESETTLED OVER 7,000 WOMEN AT RISK AND THEIR CHILDREN. WE CURRENTLY SET ASIDE AT LEAST 10.5% OF

HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM PLACES FOR WOMEN FALLING INTO THIS CATEGORY.

- IN THE LAST PROGRAMME YEAR WE EXCEEDED THIS TARGET AND RESETTLED OUR GREATEST NUMBER OF WOMEN AT RISK IN ANY YEAR, WITH THIS GROUP REPRESENTING 16.5% OF OUR OVERALL HUMANITARIAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM.
- WE ENCOURAGE OTHER STATES WHICH OPERATE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS AND DO NOT HAVE SPECIALISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR REFUGEE WOMEN AT RISK TO CONSIDER THEIR INTRODUCTION
- MR CHAIRMAN, AUSTRALIA ALSO SUPPORTS THE CONCLUSION ON THE PREVENTION AND REDUCTION OF STATELESSNESS
- THIS IS AN AREA OF UNHCR'S MANDATE THAT HAS DESERVEDLY RECEIVED RENEWED ATTENTION IN RECENT YEARS
- IT IS UNACCEPTABLE THAT THERE CONTINUE TO BE SIGNIFICANT POPULATIONS WHICH REMAIN STATELESS FOR HISTORICAL REASONS OR THAT THERE CONTINUE TO BE LAWS AND PRACTICES BY WHICH STATE ARBITRARILY TAKE AWAY THE CITIZENSHIP OF THEIR NATIONALS
- AUSTRALIA IS A PARTY TO THE 1954 AND 1961 CONVENTIONS ON STATELESSNESS AND CONTINUES TO IMPLEMENT ITS OBLIGATIONS THROUGH OUR CITIZENSHIP AND OTHER LAWS
- MR CHAIRMAN, IN RELATION TO THE NOTE ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION, AUSTRALIA WELCOMES UNHCR'S EMPHASIS ON RESETTLEMENT AND MAKING FULL AND EFFECTIVE USE OF ALL THE INTERNATIONAL RESETTLEMENT PLACES AVAILABLE
- WE HAVE STRONGLY SUPPORTED UNHCR'S DECISION TO UPGRADE THE SENIOR POSITION IN GENEVA THAT LEADS THE RESETTLEMENT FUNCTION AND ALSO THE DECISION TO CREATE A RESETTLEMENT SERVICE
- WE HAVE WELCOMED THE APPOINTMENT OF MR VINCENT COCHETEL TO THIS POSITION.
- HOWEVER WE DO HAVE SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS THAT THE FULL BENEFITS OF THESE INITIATIVES FOR REFUGEES WILL NOT BE ACHIEVED AND THE STRATEGY OF PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT UNDERMINED IF THE SENIOR RESETTLEMENT POSITION IS UNREASONABLY OVERLOADED WITH OTHER FUNCTIONS
- FINALLY, MR CHAIRMAN, IN DEALING WITH THE FULL RANGE OF PROTECTION ISSUES WORLDWIDE, FOR BOTH REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, IT SHOULD ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED THAT CIVIL SOCIETY PLAYS A VITAL PART, SOMETIMES AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL.

- I WOULD LIKE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONTRIBUTION PLAYED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN AUSTRALIA IN THIS REGARD.
- IN PARTICULAR, I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES CENTRE FOR REFUGEE RESEARCH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCLUSION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AT RISK AND ALSO A RECENT INITIATIVE BY AUSTCARE IN DEVELOPING A "RAPID RESPONSE" POOL OF PROTECTION OFFICERS TO ASSIST UNHCR AND OTHER AGENCIES IN THE FIELD IN MEETING THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS
- THANK YOU MR CHAIRMAN