



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

General Debate Statement

UNHCR Executive Committee Meeting

Mr Peter Hughes
Deputy Secretary
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Geneva, Switzerland
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Mr Chairman, I would like to take the opportunity of the milestone represented by this 60th session of Executive Committee to renew Australia's support for the work of UNHCR and, in particular, the work of its staff in the field.

Mr Chairman, the starting point for any successful humanitarian intervention is safe and secure access by humanitarian workers to those people who need their help.

Sadly, the past year has been characterised by diminished access to civilian populations and an increase in attacks on those populations and on humanitarian staff.

The tragic deaths of UNHCR staff in Pakistan earlier this year, as well as the reported 260 attacks on humanitarian workers in 2008, are completely unacceptable – Australia unreservedly condemns these acts of violence.

We call on all states, and parties to a conflict, to work to ensure UNHCR staff and their partners are given safe and unfettered access to populations in need.

We encourage UNHCR to continue to pursue security-sector reform in order to improve the security of populations of concern and the safety of staff.

Mr Chairman, the end point to which we are all working is enabling the displaced to return to a normal existence in their country of origin or to have a durable solution elsewhere.

In doing so, we must not forget those who have waited the longest.

Australia welcomes renewed efforts by the High Commissioner to address protracted refugee situations.

Patient and persistent work by UNHCR in brokering solutions has already achieved significant results.

We stand ready to support this work through diplomatic efforts, the strategic use of resettlement and the provision of funding to improve the living conditions and prospects of refugees in protracted situations.

We encourage member states to continue working towards a consensus on a protection conclusion on this topic.

Mr Chairman, Australia commends initiatives by UNHCR to reform its organisational structure and to develop and implement the Global Needs Assessment.

The Global Needs Assessment is a welcome step forward and vital to ensuring effective planning, targeted activities, transparency and efficient allocation of resources.

Given financial pressures, we look to UNHCR to clearly articulate how needs will be prioritised in practice at the country, regional and global levels.

Mr Chairman, solid partnerships, which enable the successful delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection, are important for UNHCR, particularly as it strives to meet additional responsibilities to a broader range of persons of concern.

Australia welcomes the cluster leadership role that UNHCR has accepted in relation to humanitarian action.

We appreciate the investment and mainstreaming of costs the agency has undertaken in the cluster approach.

As lead of several of the clusters, it is important that UNHCR represents the interests of the cluster as a whole.

We also welcome UNHCR strengthening coordination with other clusters and UNOCHA.

Mr Chairman, whilst the number of displaced worldwide has remained relatively stable over the past year, the situation in the Asia-Pacific region has been of concern.

Instability in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and other locations has caused an upsurge of displacement throughout the region and beyond. People smugglers are once again preying on the vulnerable.

In a region where few States are parties to the Refugees Convention, governments need to renew their cooperative efforts and to work with UNHCR to develop better frameworks for protection in order to ensure that protection is given to those who need it, solutions are achieved and the evil trade in people smuggling is curtailed.

The renewal of the Bali Process and its work in bringing together “most affected countries” to develop common approaches to particular caseloads is an important step forward.

In the long term, we need an enduring protection framework that is able to respond quickly to new situations as they arise.

Australia remains active in the region as we seek to achieve this with governments and international organisations.

UNHCR's 10 Point Plan provides a valuable tool kit for States in this process.

Thank you Mr Chairman.