

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY

20 June 2011

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. It is also 60 years since UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, was established. In that time the work of helping the world's refugees and other forcibly displaced people has neither decreased nor become easier.

Then as now, the major cause of displacement is war. Prolonged conflicts or instability in places such as Somalia, Iraq or Afghanistan, and unfolding crises in North Africa and the Middle East, are among the contributors to the current world population of almost 44 million forcibly displaced people.

But, in today's world, the reasons for displacement are more diverse. Whereas traditionally UNHCR would be called on to support people escaping conflict or persecution, people are increasingly fleeing their homes because of extreme poverty, environmental degradation, climate change and the growing and complex interrelationship between these factors and conflict.

The burden of helping the world's forcibly displaced people is starkly uneven. Poor countries host vastly more displaced people than wealthier ones. While anti-refugee sentiment is heard loudest in industrialized countries, developing nations host 80 per cent of the world's refugees. This situation demands an equitable solution.

No-one wants to become a refugee. No-one should have to endure this humiliating and arduous ordeal. Yet, millions do. Even one refugee forced to flee, one refugee forced to return to danger is one too many. On this year's World Refugee Day, I ask people everywhere to spare a thought for the millions of children, women and men who have been forced from their homes, who are at risk of their lives, and who, in most cases, want nothing more than to return home or to start afresh. Let us never lose sight of our shared humanity.