

**Address to the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNHCR Executive  
Committee**

**Geneva**

**28 September 2009**

**Acknowledgements**

High Commissioner Guterres, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, I would like to thank the High Commissioner for his invitation to speak at the opening of this 60th Executive Committee.

I regret that I can't be with you today, but I wanted to convey some thoughts on the milestone represented by the 60th meeting of this committee.

**Historical perspective on the Executive Committee**

50 years ago, in 1959, this Executive Committee was constituted to assist the High Commissioner with a membership of 25 States which was based on, and I quote, "demonstrated interest in, and devotion to, the solution of refugee problems."

Since that time, millions of refugees have been assisted by the international community and UNHCR.

Many States represented in this room have hosted, and given protection to huge populations of the displaced. Others have contributed through political, financial and resettlement action.

The UNHCR has worked to address the needs of refugees for nearly six decades.

In that time, it has earned the respect of the world for its professionalism, its uncompromising commitment to human rights and its capacity to react to changing needs.

The commitment of individual staff, sometimes giving their lives to assist refugees and displaced people, has been exemplary, and I commend them.

**New challenges and responses needed by governments**

Sadly, the challenges of displacement continue to confront us and their form is constantly changing.

UNHCR's role has expanded beyond the traditional refugee mandate to encompass increasingly large numbers of internally displaced people.

There are 31 million persons of concern to UNHCR.

Climate change threatens to create new displaced populations of unknown magnitude, but certainly whose circumstances will, in many cases, have protection dimensions.

Stateless persons are also of direct concern to UNHCR and an unresolved challenge for international cooperation.

Displacement or statelessness is a personal tragedy for every man, woman and child affected. It is a very human problem.

But it also represents a threat to global security and prosperity, which we ignore at our collective peril.

Governments must continue to work together and support the efforts of UNHCR.

We must support them politically to prevent and resolve displacement.

We must support them morally.

We must support them financially.

We must support them, and indeed each other, by sharing the responsibility.

#### **Australia in partnership with the UNHCR**

I speak today as the elected leader of twenty-two million Australians.

Many of them were refugees themselves, or descended from refugees.

This is why Australia's commitment to working with UNHCR is without question.

We have been with UNHCR from the very beginning.

Australia was the sixth country to ratify the Refugee Convention and a founding member of the UNHCR Executive Committee.

We will continue support UNHCR in cooperative measures to prevent and manage displacement, financially and through our long-standing resettlement program.

#### **Conclusion**

We face a challenging future.

But one thing we do know from experience is that lasting solutions can be achieved through global cooperation.

Working together with UNHCR - sharing responsibility and sharing the burden - we can build on the legacy of achievements to date, to meet the challenges of displacement and give people back their normal lives.

I thank you.