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## **Top UN refugee official calls for better protection for displaced people**



Opening session of the High Commissioner for Refugees' Dialogue begins in Geneva

8 December 2010 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency today called for improved measures to protect displaced and stateless people, citing gaps in current arrangements that mainly stemmed from inadequate implementation of existing treaties.

António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, identified three areas that demand particular attention; gaps in the international system for protecting displaced people; the disproportionate burden of responsibility for helping refugees that falls on poor countries; and failure by many States to tackle statelessness.

“Today’s challenges are interconnected and complex,” [said](#) Mr. Guterres in an address to government representatives and other delegates attending the annual High Commissioner’s Dialogue, a policy gathering held behind closed doors, in Geneva.

“Population growth, urbanization, climate change, water scarcity and food and energy insecurity are exacerbating conflict and combining in other ways that oblige people to flee their countries,” he said.

Speaking ahead of the 60th anniversary next Tuesday of the agency, also known as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), Mr. Guterres stressed the need for action on a growing list of displacement problems for which no international solutions exist, including natural

disasters, climate change, economic and other man-made disasters, gang violence and vulnerability to post-conflict situations.

He repeated his appeal first made in October for a “new deal” to ensure that front-line countries of asylum are not left alone in dealing with displacement from neighbouring States. Currently, developing countries host around 80 per cent of the world’s refugees, according to UNHCR.

Mr. Guterres said models for improved burden sharing already existed, citing regional efforts in Latin America and Asia, including South America’s “solidarity cities” initiative that promotes self-sufficiency among refugees, and the region’s “borders of solidarity” initiative which is designed to ensure that a mass influx of people does not damage the interests of the host population.

In Asia, the Bali process promotes a broad-based approach to complex population and refugee movements.

On statelessness, Mr. Guterres said the priority is to ensure that more countries accede to, and implement, the two key statelessness conventions. Half a century or longer since they were created, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons has only 65 signatories, while just 37 countries are party to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

“The lack of nationality represents the denial of a fundamental human right in itself,” Mr. Guterres said. “But people unable to exercise this right inevitably find as a consequence a range of other rights impaired. They may not be able to work legally or travel. They may not be able to access health care or obtain education for themselves or their children,” the High Commissioner added.

He urged States to work with UNHCR next year to address the issues of concern, ahead of the proposed ministerial-level meeting on international protection in December 2011.

Solutions included pledging to accede to the conventions or withdrawing reservations, introducing legislation to improve implementation of the conventions at national level, helping resolve particular protracted displacement or statelessness situations, and collaborating with other States to solve regional problems.

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