Part IV
The Role of the UN, Humanitarian Organisations and Peacekeepers in Post Conflict Situations
The Role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Introduction

In the mind of the general public the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is closely, even wholly, associated with armed conflict. Yet the Refugee Convention was not designed to deal with people fleeing generalized violence. UNHCR has confronted the challenges posed by the global scale of conflict and has been unable to provide solutions for many protracted caseloads in camps around the world.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, UNHCR asked the States Parties to the Refugee Convention, NGO partners and experts through a two-year Global Consultation process to assist in developing better policies and legal guidelines to deal with a range of current challenges to the protection of refugees. The outcome of the consultation process is the “Agenda for Protection”. Key issues from that document include the proper interpretation of exclusion clauses, the need for complementary protection, and security issues within camps.

This paper is presented in three parts – the first is a brief description of the history, and function of UNHCR. The second gives an overview of operational issues faced by UNHCR in armed conflict situations; and the third section deals with challenges posed to the UNHCR mandate that have been identified by the Agenda for Protection.

The Role and Functions Of UNHCR

Brief History

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established by the UN General Assembly in 1950. This was one of several attempts by the international community in the 20th century to provide protection and assistance to refugees. The League of Nations, the forerunner of the UN, named Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian scientist and explorer, to the post of High Commissioner as early as 1921.

1 The views expressed in this paper are the personal views of the Author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization.

2 Resolution 428(v) of 14 December 1950.