



AUSTRALIANS URGED TO PROTECT REFUGEES IN LIGHT OF NEW U.N. GLOBAL REPORT

A report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has found that the number of refugees worldwide soared by 1.9 million to 11.4 million at the end of 2007. The number of people displaced internally by conflict or persecution rose by 1.6 million to 26 million.

Of these, an unprecedented 25.1 million refugees and internally displaced people are now under the care of the UN refugee agency, according to the new *Global Trends 2007* report just released by the UNHCR.

UNHCR Regional Representative Richard Towle said the figures highlighted the need for the world to rally together to protect refugees.

“Protection is about ensuring those people who flee their homes because of persecution and conflict are given a place of safety, where their rights are respected, and they receive shelter and life-saving assistance,” said Mr Towle.

“With the global refugee figures climbing, we need to ensure that in this region (Australia and New Zealand) the doors continue to remain open to those who have no other choice.”

The UNHCR statistics show much of the increase in refugee figures was the result of the volatile situation in Iraq. Afghans and Iraqis accounted for nearly half of all refugees under UNHCR’s care last year.

While asylum applications worldwide have increased by 5 per cent, most refugees remain in their regions of origin - not the industrialised world.

“World Refugee Day (June 20) is an occasion to find out more about refugees worldwide and to show your support,” Mr Towle said.

To mark World Refugee Day, events around the globe will emphasise the importance of protecting refugees.

In Canberra, Immigration Minister Chris Evans will address a special World Refugee Day event on Friday. Meanwhile, Canberra’s Carillon and other key icons in the parliamentary zone, such as like Old Parliament House, are being lit in UN blue this week to mark World Refugee Day.

In Sydney, the federal Member for Bennelong, Ms Maxine McKew MP, will speak at a fundraising breakfast for UNHCR at the Westin Hotel.

“The responsibility for refugee protection is global and we can all play a part - the UN, governments, civil society and individuals,” said Mr Towle.

“Whether it’s by welcoming refugees to your community, supporting policies that ensure refugees can find safety, or helping agencies like UNHCR, everyone can help protect refugees.”

For more information about World Refugee Day and a copy of the full *Global Trends Report 2007*, visit www.unhcr.org.au

About United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is an impartial, non-political humanitarian organisation mandated by the United Nations to lead and co-ordinate international action for the world-wide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. With headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and branch offices in 116 countries, UNHCR has two key and closely related aims: to protect refugees and to seek ways to help them restart their lives.

The UNHCR Regional Office for Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific is based in Canberra and provides legal, resettlement and information services for the region.

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*UNHCR has **footage and photographs** of refugee situations around the world available for download from its ftp site. For download instructions, please call UNHCR.*