

REPORT ON THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S FIVE GLOBAL PRIORITY ISSUES
FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN

I. OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS OF THE REPORT

1. This paper provides an update of UNHCR's continuing efforts from 2003 onwards to ensure the protection and care of refugee children, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds, with regard to the five global priorities: separation; sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; military recruitment; education; specific concerns of adolescents. The situation in relation to each priority is presented in terms of challenges, activities, results and follow-up which, for the purposes of this report, focus on the main issues. Due to the nature of the information presented, no executive summary is provided, despite the length of this Paper (which exceeds the page limit for conference room papers). The conclusion sums up the key areas where UNHCR proposes to pursue measures to improve its performance. The main challenges highlighted for attention and follow-up under each priority are reflected in a draft decision which the Standing Committee is asked to adopt (annex I).

2. Information in this report has been based on UNHCR Annual Protection Reports and Participatory Assessment¹ findings. While there are commonalities in the issues facing refugee children, there are also many regional differences. The report captures some of these, but focuses mainly on the major issues, while expanding on certain aspects raised in the section on refugee women and children of the Note on International Protection. Further reporting on these issues will be detailed in the Summary update of Machel Study Follow-Up Activities in 2003-2004, to be published later this year.

II. CHALLENGES, ACTIVITIES, RESULTS AND FOLLOW-UP

A. Separation from families and caregivers

3. Challenges: The important role a family plays in the protection of a child is greatly threatened when conflict forces the flight and displacement of civilians. The loss of a care provider exacerbates the emotional distress a refugee child experiences and increases his/her risk to e.g. (sexual) abuse and exploitation, military recruitment or detention. Child-headed households are of particular concern as the taking on of parental responsibilities can aggravate children's protection risks.

4. There has been a general lack of legislative protection and procedural guidelines to ensure proper treatment and protection of unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum. Establishing effective family tracing and reunification systems for unaccompanied and separated children to enable

¹ As addressed in other reports, UNHCR has embarked on an age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy, which includes as an essential element participatory assessment. Children participate actively in these assessments, which have been conducted in 52 countries in 2005.

identification, registration and effective durable solutions remains a major challenge. This is particularly difficult in the case of unaccompanied and separated girls, who often tend to be more easily integrated into foster families before they reach the country of asylum. Consequently, they do not get registered as unaccompanied or separated, yet they are particularly exposed to abuse. Furthermore, despite extensive training for staff and partners, monitoring, reporting and follow-up mechanisms for children in interim care arrangements have not been well established in camp or urban situations. These gaps in protection systems expose unaccompanied and separated children to the dangers of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

5. In Europe, the situation of asylum-seeking unaccompanied and separated children has continued to pose challenges as regards legal guardianships for access to asylum procedures; lack of child-friendly asylum procedures, including age-appropriate reception arrangements; availability of detailed data; detention; and disappearance pending asylum processing. Although reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, in Bulgaria up to 70 per cent of unaccompanied children disappear after the registration of their asylum claim, while in Poland and Slovakia, some 100 asylum-seeking children disappeared before a decision was made on their asylum claim. According to one estimate, up to 30 per cent of the disappearances could be linked to human trafficking.²

6. Activities: UNHCR has continued to highlight the importance of prevention and response to the separation of children in repatriation operations. One example is Southern Africa, where UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children UK jointly provided training on child protection designed for the voluntary repatriation to Angola. The lessons learned from this inter-agency initiative were documented and a toolkit was developed for replication in other settings. UNHCR also mobilized the attention of its protection partners in the inter-agency standing committee protection cluster (both at the global and field level) to ensure that this and the next two priorities be reflected in needs assessment, strategy formulation and development of an improved and more predictable protection response. The same concerns were also voiced by UNHCR in the Working Group on the Protection of Civilians in New York.

7. Continued cooperation through the standby agreement between Save the Children Norway and Sweden and UNHCR has enabled the expansion of deployments to include eight child protection officers since January 2005. These deployments have strengthened UNHCR and partners' operational capacity to promote the rights of unaccompanied and separated children, including adolescents, deliver training and improve tracing and monitoring mechanisms in Thailand, Rwanda and Uganda.

8. Results: In Burundi, cooperative efforts between the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR and UNICEF resulted in the reunification of many unaccompanied and separated children with their families (over 1,250 in 2003 and almost 800 in 2004). In West Africa, the same agencies, together with Save the Children and Christian Children's Fund, constitute a sub-regional forum which has led to strengthened coordination and collaboration with regard to repatriation of unaccompanied and separated children. Collaboration within the Inter-agency Working Group (IAWG) on Separated Children³ resulted in the widely used Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Tsunami-affected Countries and on Psycho-social Care and Protection of Tsunami-affected Children.

9. Cooperation with the Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP), a network of NGOs and UNHCR in 28 European countries, as well as with other regional groups, such as Réseau Méditerranée sur les Mineurs Isolés, has made advocacy and capacity building more effective and region-specific. In

² *Freedom, Security and Justice for Separated Children?* European Conference, Brussels, 3 November 2004, Defence for Children International, Save the Children and the Separated Children in Europe Programme.

³ The IAWG consists of the ICRC, IRC, Committee, Save the Children, UNHCR, UNICEF and World Vision International.

2004, the Statement of Good Practice was reissued by SCEP and UNHCR. Joint advocacy contributed to regional standard setting and, for example, the adoption of Recommendation 1703 (2005) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Protection and Assistance for Separated Children Seeking Asylum. At a country level, SCEP has resulted in the establishment of guardianship projects; accommodation for refugee children in special Youth Welfare Hostels and the development of a handbook on good practices for private guardians in Germany; and training on guardianship in Romania and Croatia. In Nairobi, Kenya, the participatory assessment in 2005 resulted in the identification and registration of unaccompanied and separated children previously unknown to UNHCR. UNHCR subsequently strengthened its outreach to communities to ensure that unaccompanied and separated children know where to register and obtain information as well as its cooperation with the Kenyan Children's Department to provide care arrangements for children with specific needs.

10. Follow-up: The provisionally released Guidelines on Formal Determination of the Best Interests of the Child (BID guidelines) will be field-tested by staff and partners in the second half of 2006 and the final version will be published and disseminated early next year. The implementation of the guidelines will be supported through the identification of protracted operations with a substantial number of unaccompanied and separated children. These operations will be assisted to implement the BID guidelines through deployments of child protection officers from the standby roster of Save the Children Norway and Sweden. The implementation of the guidelines will strengthen the identification, registration and tracing of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as monitoring of and reporting on care arrangements. Improving UNHCR and partners' capacity in this area is an essential step in providing an effective protection system for children of concern to UNHCR. UNHCR has furthermore encouraged the use of the BID guidelines with all protection partners involved in clusterized internal displacement situations. UNHCR will continue to foster partnerships such as the IAWG on Separated Children and its collaboration with Save the Children Norway and Sweden to strengthen its work with unaccompanied and separated children. UNHCR will also pursue its work with governments and lobby for the rights of asylum-seeking children. To address the issues related to the provision of guardianship, UNHCR will map the legislation and practices in 42 European countries and produce a gaps analysis report and good practice collection.

B. Sexual exploitation, abuse and violence

11. Challenges: Refugee children are regularly confronted with exposure to sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence in the unstable environments in which they live, partly due to the tasks they are assigned in their communities: supporting the meagre family income; covering educational needs; fuel and water collection; and caring for animals. Poor socio-economic situations, harmful traditional practices and the disruption in family roles are some of the main precursors of child labour, trafficking and abuse. Girls are specifically at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM), under-age and forced marriages, exploitation and rape. Traditional practices can reinforce gender inequalities and leave the rights of children unprotected.

12. There have been several reports of child labour, exposure to harassment and sexual violence as well as exploitation and abuse both inside and outside of school. Of concern also are reports on "survival sex" or forced prostitution among refugee girls and, at times, refugee boys as well. In participatory assessments sexual exploitation, domestic violence and other abuses were linked to stressful environments, assistance shortages and the lack of livelihood opportunities. Those responsible for the exploitation, abuse and violence were mainly members of the community, people from the wider host community as well as peacekeepers and, on occasion, humanitarian workers including teachers.

13. Activities: Efforts to enhance prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) require a holistic, multi-sectoral approach with follow-up and assistance to survivors, including health care, psychosocial support, legal/justice support and safety/security. A Back-to-School project was introduced in 2003 in Meheba Settlement, Zambia, to assist adolescent girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy. In 2005, twelve grade 12 students (girls) sat for their examinations, a 25 per cent increase on the previous year. In Nepal, Children's Forums were established to advocate for the protection of children from child labour, child trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. From mid-2005, UNHCR worked with the local non-governmental organization (NGO) Mother and Child Development Organisation to continue awareness raising on FGM with the aim to eradicate the practice in Kebribeyah refugee camp in Ethiopia. An assessment was conducted and participatory community dialogues were held which allowed for a better understanding of the community's view, beliefs and practices.

14. UNHCR's contribution to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children seeks to address what makes refugee children particularly vulnerable to violence and actions to ensure their protection. Together with the Secretariat of the Study and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, UNHCR recently organized an inter-agency thematic consultation on violence against refugee and other displaced children to provide input to the study. The consultation stressed the importance of education as a protection tool and the need for child protection systems.

15. Results: While training and awareness-raising activities on child rights and SGBV have been implemented in several countries, immediate results are hard to measure. What could, however, be seen as a result of training and participatory assessments is a strengthening of SGBV prevention and response activities, such as in Benin, Botswana, Colombia and India.

16. In eastern Chad, an SGBV prevention strategy was developed and implemented which included child-friendly referral systems and reporting mechanisms along with psychosocial support for children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation, abuse or violence. Furthermore, the participatory research with children in Southern Africa has resulted in the formation of peer support groups, psychosocial support for children using art as a medium, and SGBV training for police and military and other personnel responsible for security.

17. Follow-up: UNHCR is continuing participatory research with children to identify protection risks and community-based responses for protection from abuse, violence and exploitation. Additionally, provision of guidance through Standard Operating Procedures for prevention and response to SGBV will improve prevention, response and follow-up activities in coordination with partners. UNHCR will also follow up on the relevant recommendations resulting from the UN Study on Violence against Children.

C. Military recruitment

18. Challenges: The risk of recruitment of children by armed groups and forces is a particular concern for refugee children whose proximity to conflict and border areas make them susceptible. Events in eastern Chad are a recent example. Such recruitment not only constitutes violence against children, but also leads to these children learning extremely violent behaviour. The prevailing socio-economic situation and insecurity reduce the community's capacity to protect children. The few opportunities for secondary education and employment skills training mean that young people are particularly at risk of recruitment. Ensuring the humanitarian and civilian nature of the camps is largely dependent on the capacity of hosting governments to fulfil this responsibility and is essential to preventing recruitment. Funding constraints have reduced UNHCR and partners' capacity to support governments and communities to address the socio-economic causes. Limitations on freedom of movement and the right to work can exacerbate the problem.

19. For girls, a lack of gender perspective in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes has meant their specific needs and participation have not been adequately addressed, creating obstacles for their reintegration into communities. While several challenges in the reintegration process are similar for girls and boys, girls face additional challenges when subjected to forced military recruitment as they often have to provide sexual services and as a result become pregnant and/or contract HIV.

20. Activities: Preventive and rehabilitative efforts have included enrolment in formal, non-formal and vocational education, income-generating and recreational activities, family reunification, and psychosocial services. The provision of adequate food rations and other assistance, particularly education, also reduces the risk of recruitment of displaced and war-affected children. UNHCR lobbies with governments to protect refugee children from recruitment. Recently, UNHCR has met with Chadian authorities several times to highlight their responsibilities to prevent military recruitment, of refugee youth in particular, under international law.

21. Situational assessments have allowed UNHCR to target actions for the protection of children. For instance, in Rwanda, UNHCR, UNICEF and Save the Children jointly promoted children's rights with regard to child disappearances and recruitment in camps. Lists of missing children have been established to assist ICRC and UNICEF in conducting tracing activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Thailand, UNHCR and UNICEF established a UN Country Team Working Group on Children Affected by Armed Conflict/Child Soldiers within the framework of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of Security Council Resolution 1612 and an action plan has been drawn up.

22. In Ecuador, UNHCR reported an increased number of unaccompanied refugee children (from 66 in 2004, to 103 in 2005 (65 male and 38 female)), most of whom were aged between 16 and 17 years (88 per cent) and fled Colombia mainly to avoid recruitment by irregular armed groups. Some of these adolescents were even recruited for a while but managed to escape. These children are given priority for lodging, subsistence allowance, health care, including psychosocial support, and education assistance. However, due to the limited State capacity, in some cases the specific needs could not be adequately met in the country of asylum.

23. Results: Although on a limited scale, UNHCR has implemented some projects for children formerly associated with armed groups and forces. In Guinea, reintegration of these children in their community and in school was strengthened through psychosocial counselling and community services officers following up through home visits and educational/recreational activities. In Sierra Leone, Liberian children formerly associated with armed groups and forces were reintegrated into the refugee community. UNHCR and UNICEF worked together to move 22,000 children from disarmament and demobilization sites to care facilities for reintegration activities in Liberia.

24. Follow-up: UNHCR will continue to work with governments to ensure the humanitarian and civilian character of refugee camps and UNHCR guidelines will be published this year, which highlight the issue of children associated with armed groups and forces as well as the considerations for women and girls. UNHCR will work to monitor absences of groups of refugee children in partnership with communities, particularly educational establishments; improve livelihood and educational opportunities for adolescent girls and boys; monitor their access to and use of assistance; and increase their participation in community life and programme design. UNHCR will also be involved in the review of the Cape Town Principles⁴ initiated by UNICEF, which aims to update best practices as well as to obtain broader political endorsement of protecting children from involvement in armed groups and forces.

⁴ Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilisation and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, UNICEF (1997).

D. Education

25. Challenges: The provision of education to refugee children is not only a fundamental right, but the means by which a community can provide protection, normalcy, social support and opportunities for refugee girls and boys. The provision of education to all refugee children is hampered by lack of resources for quality education, low attendance rates due to economic constraints, cultural perceptions of gender roles along with reluctance of host communities and governments to accept refugee and asylum-seeking students into their schools.

26. There is still a critical need to establish safe school environments so that girls and boys can attend school free from threats including, but not limited to, corporal punishment, discrimination, exploitation and abuse including by those responsible for their care.

27. Activities: Technical missions were fielded in countries with specific education gaps identified through standards and indicators reports to target activities aimed to increase enrolment and retention rates with gender parity. Teacher training was implemented in several countries, including Ecuador, Hungary and Nepal, to enhance the quality of education and to address the specific needs of refugee students. In India, financial assistance and an extensive drop-out tracking and support programme has encouraged and increased the attendance of refugee children. In Guinea, UNHCR and IRC established gender initiatives in schools, including a Code of Conduct for teachers, female classroom assistants to monitor abuse and attempts to increase the number of female teachers. UNHCR is also encouraging the establishment of education committees through which partnerships between UNHCR, NGOs, UN partners, governments and refugees can be enhanced and communities mobilized. These committees exist for example in Djibouti, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Nepal, and Thailand.

28. Improving the quality of education was sought through regional and national workshops in Asia; West, Central and East Africa; Europe; Colombia; and the Middle East and North Africa. The workshops focused on the implementation of UNHCR's Education Field Guidelines through partnerships, a community-based approach and coordination with education ministries and partners. Peace education activities continued to be implemented, including in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Uganda. In coordination with UNESCO and UNOPS peace education materials were finalized for dissemination in 2006. Girls' secondary school scholarship programmes were sustained in Ghana, Uganda and Zambia and in follow up to efforts to support girls' education, young women are targeted under the DAFI programme.⁵

29. Results: UNHCR has worked with NGOs and governments to improve access to education for refugee children. For example, UNHCR intervention and dialogue with the Ministry of Education in Azerbaijan safeguarded access to education for Chechen asylum-seeker and refugee children who were unable to enrol in state schools prior to 2003. In Myanmar, UNHCR and WFP collaborated to raise attendance through feeding programmes that have led to increased attendance rates at primary schools, particularly for girls.

30. Follow-up: An Education Assessment and Programming Tool is being developed to build on participatory assessments to ensure adequate programming of education from emergency to durable solutions and to ensure that implementation is in keeping with UNHCR Education Field Guidelines. To support the quality of education, a standardized refugee teachers training manual is being developed and will include issues such as gender quality, prevention of SGBV, professional ethics and conduct, prevention of HIV/AIDS and human rights. The partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council for

⁵ DAFI is the German-funded and only tertiary scholarship programme for refugees which currently provides approximately 1000 scholarships (43per cent women) to the most deserving refugees in 38 countries.

deployments of Education Officers will continue and recommendations from a recent evaluation will be implemented to strengthen UNHCR's education programmes. UNHCR is also an active member of the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies which has produced the Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies that UNHCR will further disseminate through a series of workshops.

E. Adolescents

31. Challenges: Adolescents are at a difficult stage in their lives and in the context of displacement are more likely to take on more responsibilities within the family, be recruited into armed groups and forces, or be at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Often there is limited access to education for adolescents, sometimes as a result of income-generating responsibilities or simply due to a lack of post-primary education. Adolescents are at risk of exploitative labour, HIV and AIDS, and, in the case of girls, early pregnancies, but they are often not supported in the community or by agencies. Girls are at higher risk of contracting HIV due to biological and behavioural factors; the latter include circumstances that may cause them to engage in "survival sex" and a lack of empowerment to negotiate safer sex. Children's programmes often focus on younger children and have in the past failed to meet the specific needs of adolescents and their role in the community. In Kenya a lack of opportunity and purpose has demonstrably driven older children and young adults to engage in criminal activities.

32. Activities: The provision of non-formal education and activities such as youth groups for adolescents has aimed at identifying the particular issues of importance for this age group. UNHCR has for example partnered with the NGO Right to Play in Sierra Leone, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Thailand to form youth groups and recreational activities that promote youth involvement and leadership. Participation was also promoted through clubs and forums, including in Zambia, Namibia and Nepal. In West Africa, a pilot project for Liberian adolescent refugees provided vocational training and income-generating activities as a means to use marketable skills to facilitate reintegration in Liberia and respond to protection problems. The Community Development Centre in Beirut, Lebanon, served more and more as a learning and recreational venue providing vocational and language training and enhancing capacities, alleviating stress, building confidence, and encouraging the active participation of refugee children and in particular adolescents. Additionally, the Lebanese Red Cross administered a course on First Aid Training for adolescents and organized meetings for them on issues such as HIV and AIDS, drug addiction, nutrition, environment, technologies and friendship.

33. Results: UNHCR has worked with partner agencies with the aim to use programmes as a means for skills development as well as to identify the priorities of adolescents. In Azerbaijan, UNHCR and implementing partner Umid provided young internally displaced persons with opportunities to learn skills that directly impacted their ability to be employed through an apprenticeship programme in local businesses that included mobile phone repair, car repair, hairdressing and tailoring. In many regions youth groups have provided a forum for refugee adolescents to voice issues that are of concern to them. In Sierra Leone, requests of youth in camps led to the expansion of skills training activities to include carpentry, masonry, bread-baking and weaving. Also, in Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Roots and Shoots programme provided environment-focused educational activities and opened a gateway for refugee adolescents to share their experiences with others.

34. Follow-up: UNHCR will carry on strengthening adolescent participation in youth groups and participatory assessments are a key tool in addressing important issues adolescents are facing, following-up on protection risks identified and solutions proposed by adolescents themselves. Partnerships and community approaches will be used to continue vocational training programmes, assistance in educational and income-generating programmes as a means to safeguarding future opportunities. UNHCR in

collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) plans to evaluate the pilot project in West Africa, which provides marketable skills to facilitate reintegration of young people on return, with a view to its replication. The Office will also collaborate with UNICEF in respect to adolescent programming in emergencies, as well as continue to work with IRC and ZOA Refugee Care on Roots and Shoots projects.

F. Other issues of concern

35. While the five global priorities are the main issues affecting children, there are other areas of concern, including birth registration, prevention and reduction of statelessness, detention, lack of sufficient attention to children with disabilities and suffering from trauma, psychosocial support and ensuring that legislative safeguards on the protection of refugee children are implemented.

36. In Malaysia, UNHCR has successfully intervened and secured the release of children in detention, while its implementing and operational partners (Kumpulan ACTS, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Buddhist Association) conduct weekly visits to detention centres to provide medical assistance and psychosocial support. In several European countries, UNHCR has worked with NGO partners on advocacy, monitoring and intervention for the release of children from detention-like facilities, which has led to a regular presence by UNHCR and/or partners in detention facilities to protect children of concern. Joint efforts between UNHCR, UNICEF and government authorities have led to the provision of birth certificates in countries including Guinea Bissau and the Republic of the Congo. Awareness raising and sensitization on children's rights have been implemented among staff, implementing partners and government agencies. This work has led to better coordination between UNHCR and partner organizations, such as in Senegal where collaboration with NGOs led to the establishment of an early warning system to highlight situations that could be harmful to the best interests of the child. UNHCR will continue to strengthen collaboration with UNICEF to lobby for the birth registration of refugee children and with governments to protect children from detention. Psychosocial programmes were started in 2005 in all camps in eastern Chad with varying degrees of success, given that few implementing partners in charge of community services in the camps were highly specialised in psychosocial issues. In Costa Rica, bi-weekly workshops were organized for children between the ages of 9 and 11 years aimed at developing their social and communication skills and at providing a positive, supportive environment in which they could share experiences with other refugee children.

III. OTHER GLOBAL RESPONSES: DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF STANDARDS

37. In addition to actions addressing child protection within the structure of the five global priorities for refugee children, UNHCR has worked to highlight concerns for refugee children within the broader agenda to promote the rights of children. To this end, UNHCR actively contributed to the drafting of General Comment 6 (CRC/GC/2005/6) on the Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside Their Country of Origin, which was adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on 3 June 2005. Particular note is taken *inter alia* of the clarifications of the Committee on the scope of *non-refoulement* obligations deriving from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which include protection against return of a child "to the borders of a State where there is a real risk of under-age recruitment". The Comment also stresses the need for child-friendly and gender-sensitive refugee status determination, "taking into account the particular motives for, and forms of manifestations of, persecution experienced by children". The IAWG on Separated Children published and disseminated the Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (2004), which has strengthened inter-agency collaboration at field level. Moreover, coordination with partners has facilitated ongoing trainings using the Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) training modules throughout the world. An evaluation of ARC was conducted in 2005 and recommendations are being followed up to ensure that ARC remains a valuable and relevant tool for capacity building on the protection of children in emergencies.

IV. CONCLUSION

38. The protection of the rights of refugee children is a shared concern for many organizations, governments and NGOs. In addressing the five priorities for refugee children, UNHCR uses a two-pronged approach of age, gender and diversity mainstreaming and targeted action to promote the respect for the rights of children and gender equality. It has worked with various partners to enhance the effectiveness of activities geared towards the protection of refugee children. UNHCR has improved the support that children of concern receive in regard to vocational programmes for adolescents, assistance to access schools, sensitization and awareness raising among communities and counselling services for victims of abuse and violence. Moreover, continued participation will ensure that programmes better meet the specific needs of refugee girls and boys, including adolescents, and promote their rights.

39. However, challenges remain in addressing critical issues for refugee children, particularly in improving the economic situation of refugees which invariably plays a key role in many issues of concern such as domestic abuse, school drop-out rates, exploitation, trafficking and early marriages. Furthermore, UNHCR must continue to monitor the treatment of refugee children so that national and international standards are upheld and that responsible governments and agencies are accountable for their role in supporting the protection of children's rights.

40. The gaps identified in the protection of children highlight the need for a clearer understanding of what constitutes an effective child protection system and accountability for it,⁶ as well as for enhanced and more sustained attention on the part of all actors in particular in the identification, registration, tracing and family reunification of unaccompanied girls and boys. In addition, the follow-up and monitoring of all children-in-care require strengthening to avoid abuse, neglect and denial of other rights. This can only be achieved through continued inter-agency cooperation; the assumption by responsibility by States with the support of UNHCR; and the meaningful participation of refugee girls, boys, men and women of all ages and backgrounds.

41. Key recommendations for follow-up action on each of the five priorities outlined above in section III are reflected in the draft decision attached to this report which is being presented to the Standing Committee for adoption.

⁶ Accountability benchmarks will be finalized and introduced in UNHCR to measure progress on age, gender and diversity mainstreaming as well as on targeted action to address the discrimination of children, youth, women and persons affected by / and / or at risk of SGBV through application of a rights and community based approach.

DRAFT DECISION ON THE FIVE GLOBAL PRIORITIES FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the recommendations of the United Nations Study on the Impact of Conflict on Children (the Machel Study) and UNHCR's commitment to follow up on its recommendations by announcing five global priorities relating to refugee children in 1997, and

Reaffirming the importance of strengthening the protection and care of refugee children and other children of concern to UNHCR in general and notably with regard to separation, sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, military recruitment, education, the specific concerns of adolescents, nutrition, health and participation in decisions affecting their lives,

1. *Takes note* of document EC/57/SC/CRP.16, which provides an update on UNHCR's efforts to address the five global priorities for refugee children;
2. *Acknowledges* UNHCR's progress in mainstreaming age, gender and diversity and the role it plays in strengthening the protection and participation of children; and *requests* UNHCR to ensure that this strategy remains an integral part of its programming and is further strengthened through the accountability framework;
3. *Notes* the important role that education plays in the protection of children, in adding to a sense of normality in everyday life and in providing skills and knowledge for the future; and *requests* UNHCR to pursue all efforts to budget adequate funds for quality basic education with gender parity, while providing a safe school environment;
4. *Notes* with appreciation the provisional release of the Guidelines for Formal Best Interests Determination and urges UNHCR and its partners to collaborate to ensure sufficient capacity to implement these guidelines in operations;
5. *Recognizes* that a systematic approach to the protection of refugee children is required; and *encourages* UNHCR to enhance its partnership with child protection agencies to build a common understanding of an effective child protection system and an implementation strategy to implement it in all operations.