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21 February 2005

HIGH COMMISSIONER LUBBERS ADVISES STAFF OF RESIGNATION

GENEVA -- U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers advised his staff early Monday that he had tendered his resignation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Mr. Lubbers sent his resignation to the Secretary-General on Sunday evening.

The text of Mr. Lubbers' letter to some 6,000 UNHCR staff in more than 115 countries is as follows:

"Dear Colleagues,

"Many of you will know by now that I wrote yesterday to the Secretary-General Kofi Annan, officially tendering my resignation as High Commissioner for Refugees.

"I regret the sudden news and would have preferred to deliver it another way. Let me assure you first that I did not take this decision lightly. My resolve is firm, however. I informed the Deputy and Assistant High Commissioner, as well as the Chairman of ExCom and Chairperson of the Staff Council, of my intentions before communicating with the Secretary-General.

"As I have said many times and repeated to the Secretary-General, I believe wholeheartedly that UNHCR and its staff are an asset to the U.N. family. The opportunity to serve as High Commissioner for Refugees was a genuine honour for me and for more than four years I devoted all my energy to the organization and the people of concern to the Office. This will remain for me as one of the most compelling and rewarding periods of my professional career. Most of all, I am tremendously proud of you, UNHCR staff, and everything you have achieved while I had the privilege of leading the organization.

"My decision to resign has much to do with my wish not to complicate life for the Secretary-General, who is facing a series of problems and ongoing pressure from the media. In a way, our own UNHCR has less of these problems. I have every confidence that UNHCR will continue to be a vital, imaginative and effective humanitarian organization.

**Media Relations
Public Information
Service**

hqpi00@unhcr.ch

HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2

Tel.:
(41 22) 739 85 02

Fax:
(41 22) 739 73 15

www.unhcr.ch

"However, there should be no gap in leadership. Therefore, during the transition period I will continue to be available until my successor has been identified and is ready to take over.

"Once again, I am proud of UNHCR and thank you for all your support."

Signed: High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers
21 February 2005

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Media Relations & Public Information Service
UNHCR
HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
CH-1211 Geneva 2

Tel: 41 22 739 8502
Fax: 41 22 739 7314
Email: hqpi00@unhcr.ch
Website: www.unhcr.ch

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Public Information
Service**

hqpi00@unhcr.ch

HQPI00
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2

Tel.:
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Fax:
(41 22) 739 73 15

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