



Geneva, 19 June 2006

“Hope” is the word as World Refugee Day is marked around the globe

UN refugee agency staff and partner organisations around the globe are marking World Refugee Day on Tuesday (June 20) with hundreds of special events and activities focusing on the theme, “Hope.”

This year's theme was chosen to highlight the continuing efforts of UNHCR and its partners to find lasting solutions for millions of refugees and displaced people worldwide.

“If there is one common trait among the tens of millions of refugees that we at the UN refugee agency have helped over the past 55 years, it’s the fact that despite losing everything, they never give up hope,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres.

"Despite the enormity of their suffering, refugees never give up their dream of home and all it entails ... the fact they maintain that hope, sometimes against all odds, should be an inspiration to us all," Guterres added.

UNHCR currently cares for some 20.8 million refugees, internally displaced people, stateless people and other groups considered of concern to the agency.

The latest statistics show the global number of refugees, some 8.4 million people, has fallen to the lowest level in 26 years as more than 6 million refugees have returned to their countries of origin in the last four years.

Returning refugees often still face a bleak future back home and greater efforts are needed to ensure that countries recovering from years of violence receive the necessary help during the critical post-conflict phase.

“The international community needs to devote much more attention to the transition between relief and development, to rebuilding societies which have been ripped apart by violence,” said Guterres.

Around the globe, June 20 will be marked by events as diverse as traditional dance and music performances, sports competitions, food bazaars, fashion shows, film festivals, photo and art exhibitions, poetry recitals and an auction of refugee art.

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With the World Cup in full swing, it was inevitable that football (soccer) is the sport of choice to mark the occasion, with matches being played in more than 20 countries including Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Nepal and Turkmenistan.

High Commissioner Guterres is scheduled to spend the day near the Liberia-Sierra Leone border in West Africa. He is expected to meet a repatriation convoy bringing Liberian refugees back from Sierra Leone, and to accompany them on their journey home.

In Geneva, the headquarters of UNHCR, the city's emblematic 140-metre-high fountain will be coloured blue – the colour of the United Nations. Australia will do likewise in Canberra, illuminating the Captain Cook Jet, the old parliament building and other landmarks.

Other highlights include a global campaign focusing on sports and education to be launched in London. This initiative is an example of how business partners are helping UNHCR to bring hope to refugee youth.

Users of public transport in cities such as Athens, Moscow, Prague, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro will come across a campaign designed to raise public awareness about refugees.

These events, and hundreds of others around the world, are designed to draw attention to refugees' hopes for basic survival, sustenance and protection, and to the need to find lasting solutions to their plight – a return to their own home, integration in the country of asylum or resettlement in a third country.

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For more information on UNHCR's global World Refugee Day activities, please visit our website at www.unhcr.org

