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Global refugee crisis requires a paradigm shift on refugee protection

Amnesty International recommendations to UN Member States

The world is facing the worst global refugee crisis since World War II. The number of refugees is now close to 20 million. The large majority of refugees, 86 percent, are hosted in developing countries. This stark imbalance undermines the United Nations Refugee Convention¹'s core principle of responsibility and burden-sharing and poses serious challenges to the system of international protection.

Over four million women, men and children have fled Syria to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey.² Only 2.6 percent have been offered resettlement places globally.³ The UN humanitarian appeal for Syrian refugees is only 37 percent funded, forcing the UN to drastically cut aid to refugees.

In Africa, people fleeing conflict and persecution in countries like South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Burundi, have added hundreds of thousands to the longstanding refugee populations from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kenya is home to Dadaab - the world's largest refugee camp, which was set up in 1991.

In the first eight months of 2015, more than 350,000 people have fled to the European Union in search of protection or a better life and over 2,800 people have lost their lives in their attempt to reach safety. In the next sailing season in October, refugees and migrants in South East Asia will again take to boats to leave their home countries and are likely to be at serious risk at sea⁴ unless adequate search and rescue systems and other necessary measures are put in place urgently.

Amnesty International believes that a paradigm shift on refugee protection is required. It must include the following eight key actions by the international community:⁵

- **An international summit on the global refugee crisis** focused on increasing international responsibility and burden sharing;
- **Universal ratification of the United Nations Refugee Convention;**
- **Develop robust domestic refugee systems:** States must have fair domestic procedures to assess refugee claims and must guarantee the fundamental rights of refugees;

¹ UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951).

² Amnesty International, Syria's Refugee Crisis in numbers, 4 September 2015, available on <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>.

³ Since the start of the conflict in Syria, only 104,410 resettlement places have been offered globally.

⁴ In the first half of 2015, approximately 31,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis departed from the Bay of Bengal on smugglers boats. In May 2015 at least 5,000 people were abandoned by smugglers at sea before eventually disembarking in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

⁵ Amnesty International, The Global Refugee Crisis: A Conspiracy of Neglect, 15 June 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol40/1796/2015/en/>

- **An absolute commitment to saving lives first:** States must prioritise saving people over implementing immigration policies;
- **Combat trafficking:** States must take effective action to investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs. States should offer protection and assistance to victims of trafficking and ensure access to refugee status determination procedures and resettlement;
- **Combat xenophobia:** Governments must refrain from engaging in xenophobia themselves, for example by implying or directly claiming asylum-seekers and migrants are to blame for economic and social problems. Governments must also have effective policies to address xenophobic violence;
- **Fulfil all resettlement needs identified by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** Amnesty International estimates that 1.38 million resettlement and humanitarian admission places will be needed over the next two years;
- **Establish a global refugee fund:** Such a fund should fulfil all UN humanitarian appeals for refugee crises. This fund should also provide meaningful financial support to countries hosting large numbers of refugees to help them provide services to refugees and their host communities. This should be additional to existing development aid.