



MESSAGE

BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

**ON THE OCCASION OF
WORLD REFUGEE DAY**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
NEW YORK
20 JUNE 2006**

Five years ago, at the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the United Nations General Assembly decided to designate 20 June as World Refugee Day.

Today, as for the past five years, observances are taking place in cities and towns, in refugee camps and in numerous settlements in every continent, to pay tribute to refugees and displaced people. This is an opportunity for the world not only to honour their courage and determination, but also to send a clear message that their plight has not been forgotten.

The theme for World Refugee Day this year is hope. No theme could be more fitting. Hope is what uprooted men, women and children give up last, in spite of often having lost everything. Hope that they will find protection and safety in a country of asylum after their terrible ordeal. Hope that they will be able to lead productive lives during their exile. Hope that, one day, conflict at home will cease and that they will be able to return voluntarily and rebuild their lives.

As we celebrate this year's World Refugee Day, there are indeed encouraging facts.

Over the past 55 years, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners have helped more than 50 million uprooted people find durable solutions – and this work continues in more than 100 countries. In 2005, the number of refugees worldwide decreased to a 26-year low. In 2005 alone, some 1.1 million refugees returned home.

On the other hand, for too many refugees protracted wars continue to translate into protracted exile, very often in difficult conditions. More than five million refugees have been in exile for five years or longer – some of them for decades. At the same time, conflicts in a number of countries are increasing the number of internally displaced people every day.

Let today, therefore, be an opportunity to renew our collective commitment as an international community to do everything possible to address the root causes of displacement. This will be the best way to honour the uprooted and to contribute to keeping alive their courage and hope.