

ILO STATEMENT
UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SESSION

6 MARCH 2008

Employment and self-employment enable conflict-affected men and women to establish sustainable livelihoods: they are essential peacebuilding tools. Employment growth facilitates broad inclusive recovery and is fundamental to the sustained reintegration of male and female returnees and other conflict affected groups.

Employment and reintegration need functioning markets for not only labour, but also for goods and services. As conflict ends, urban and rural unemployment rates are generally high in both formal and informal labour markets. Labour market recovery is also impaired by the disruption of social relations and a consequential lack of trust within communities, the inability to enforce contracts, and lack of purchasing power. Security concerns may even close down informal open-air markets. Such a lack of security restricts free movement of goods and workers.

On the other hand, opportunities may arise to revert the negative cycle. The end of conflict creates a window of opportunity for social and economic reform. Post-conflict relief and reconstruction activities can provide returnees with their first experiences of organized work, facilitating what is a commonly difficult transition to the workplace. The surge of aid directed to infrastructure investment can make use of labour-intensive and labour-friendly techniques, absorbing the job-seekers that create the conditions for sustainable reintegration, instrumental for reviving the local economy.

These scenarios illuminate how the path from humanitarian relief to sustainable development in post-crisis situations does not resemble a well-paved sidewalk. Challenges are too complex, needs far too varied for our efforts to reflect an approach that so simply segments our work into the orthodox phases of humanitarian relief and sustainable development.

It is thus with great praise that the ILO congratulates our partners at UNHCR for recognizing this need to shed such a segmented approach in their Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy regarding their Role in Support of the Return and Integration of Displaced Populations. The path, in reality, is one we must guide each other upon.

We have real reason to be optimistic, because the ILO and UNHCR have already taken those first steps together. Our **ILO-UNHCR Partnership for Socio-economic Reintegration**, initiated in 2004 to promote sustainable livelihoods for displaced populations, has pioneered new avenues for interagency cooperation while affirming the complementary nature of our respective mandates.

The preliminary fruits of our partnership are various and promising, combining the UNHCR's vast knowledge and presence in displacement situations with ILO technical expertise in livelihood generation, vocational training, labour market information, microfinance, enterprise development, emergency employment services and local economic development strategies. Emphasizing the localized, regional dimension utilized in the ILO's Local Economic Recovery (LER) approach, and reiterated in the

UNHCR **Policy Framework** here, the ILO and UNHCR have successfully conducted joint-operations in over twenty countries.

Together, we have improved the skills and training provided to the refugees and displaced of many conflict-affected countries. We have developed small enterprises and promoted women and youth empowerment. We have formulated comprehensive studies on reintegration options, and developed local economic development projects. We have shown operational flexibility, conducting interventions not only at the community level, but also in nation-wide programmes in countries like Afghanistan and Liberia, where the ILO has constructed its presence around the pre-existing UNHCR structure.

Such experiences have helped inspire the drafting of the UN-system-wide policy for “Employment Creation, Income Generation and Reintegration in Post-Conflict Settings”, which is expected to become operational later this year. This policy responds to a decision of the UN secretary general of November 2006, which called for all UN agencies to define common approaches to employment and reintegration built around a set of guiding principles and programming guidelines. The new UNHCR Policy Framework is well attuned with the previously mentioned UN post-conflict employment policy. The UN system has thus recognized that decent work is a pillar of peace-building activities.

Decent work entices peace. It is one of the most essential ingredients to ensuring the sustainable return of a displaced community, involving potential peace process spoilers and vulnerable groups in the recovery process in equal measure. It runs as a unifying thread throughout recovery efforts, affording the security, dignity, self-esteem and hope that are so often in short supply in post-conflict areas, and providing critical traction to other recovery efforts.

It is essential to preserve this initial inertia generated by the **Partnership**, reaffirming the need to streamline the often-overlapping relief and development processes by strengthening interagency cooperation as spearheaded through the IASC – Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery.

We reiterate our gratitude to the donor and recipient countries that encourage and support our path-breaking joint programme. We should, however, draw attention to our hope that resource maximization can be made more inclusive to both implementing agencies, which would enable the fluency between the relief and development processes to be fully realized. A transitional funding mechanism designed to address critical funding gaps incurred by a technical agency, such as the ILO, would pose an ideal solution.

It is in recognition of these promising beginnings that the ILO looks forward to redefining the path linking humanitarian relief and sustainable development at the side of its implementing partner, UNHCR.

The ILO looks forward to continuing the mutual guidance we have provided each other down that path.