



**Points of consideration
Related to global and domestic refugee and statelessness issues**

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Introduction

The Government and the people of Japan continue to provide strong political, financial and other relevant support to UNHCR's global activities in relation to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP) as well as stateless persons. UNHCR deeply appreciates this support, which has been critical in our – and our partners' - efforts to respond to an ever increasing number of humanitarian crisis situations world-wide.

UNHCR also wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan for undertaking - during the previous legislative period - a number of important steps in support of domestic refugee protection matters. Such steps include the decision to transform the present pilot resettlement programme into a regular refugee resettlement programme from 2015 and the establishment of a Sub-Committee under the Ministry of Justice to review the domestic asylum system. As to the latter, UNHCR wishes to acknowledge the fact that it has been given an opportunity to actively contribute to the deliberations of the committee.

It is hoped that Japan will continue its leadership role in global humanitarian affairs. Equally, it is hoped that the Government will proactively pursue its efforts to further strengthen its national asylum system with a view to ensuring that all persons in need of international protection will have access to their rights enshrined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter 1951 Convention).

Against this backdrop, UNHCR wishes to highlight four areas which are critical to the work of the office – together with a set of recommendations - which we hope to pursue with the Government and other relevant counterparts in close dialogue and in a spirit of partnership. We hope that by presenting the four thematic areas listed below in one document it will serve as a useful reference point for all interested in global as well as domestic affairs related to refugees and stateless persons.

1. Partnership and public awareness
2. Establishment of a comprehensive asylum system
3. Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission
4. Statelessness

1. Partnership and public awareness

Japan is a major donor to UNHCR and, in 2014, Japan's contribution to UNHCR marked US\$181,612,466. Over the years, Japan has managed to position itself as a prestigious leader in humanitarian support. The country has gained enormous respect for its strong humanitarian engagement and has featured as a good practice example. Japan's Humanitarian Aid Policy as well as the Development Cooperation Charter, in particular, are key in advancing policy matters on forced displacement issues. Taking Human Security as the central concept, these policies enhance cooperation with international agencies, amongst other partners, in tackling global issues such as human displacement. Japan also takes a leading role in ensuring synergies between humanitarian and development funding and partnership, which is critical for the seamless transition from emergency response to development and to finding solutions to refugee situations.

UNHCR's needs based budget alone is currently US\$ 6.23 billion. Given the number, size, and complexity of new emergencies, needs are growing considerably faster than the level of funds available to UNHCR and its partners. We thus wish to express the hope that Japan will

continue to take a leading role in responding to humanitarian needs and will be able to further strengthen its contributions to the protection and assistance of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons.

It is in this context that UNHCR will - as part of its external relations and partnership building activities - continue to facilitate the mobilisation of Japan's humanitarian resources (financial, in-kind, human resource and technical cooperation) for UNHCR's global operations. The Office will also seek to deepen its partnership in the areas of humanitarian assistance, peace-building and solutions/development not only with relevant government ministries and agencies, but also with bilateral development agencies, including UN/International Organizations, JICA, civil society and NGOs.

In order to garner the necessary support, UNHCR considers it indispensable to enhance public awareness on the issue of forced displacement and humanitarian crisis, and on how Japan's humanitarian resources continue alleviating the suffering of millions of displaced persons. With this in mind, UNHCR will strive to further enhance public information and outreach activities, such as the World Refugee Day and the UNHCR Refugee Film Festival together with a wide range of partners, such as the media, academic and cultural institutions, student groups, the private sector, as well as the Japan Association for UNHCR.

Proactively engaging the public in refugee protection debates not only helps to create an understanding towards the displaced, but also provides valuable opportunities to increase the visibility of Japan's contributions to global refugee issues. UNHCR encourages that the Government takes a leading role in creating an environment where awareness on displacement can be effectively raised in close cooperation with UNHCR and other relevant actors.

2. Establishment of a comprehensive asylum system

In November 2011, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the 1951 Convention and the 30th anniversary of Japan's accession thereto, the Diet of Japan adopted unanimously a "resolution concerning Japan's continued commitment to refugee protection and search for solutions". In the resolution, GOJ renewed its commitment 'to develop a comprehensive asylum process in Japan'. In UNHCR's view, such a comprehensive approach encompasses the following areas:

- Development of a comprehensive and dedicated asylum law

With reference to the above Resolution and for Japan to develop a truly comprehensive asylum process and system, it is recommended that an appropriate and dedicated legal framework is developed, covering reception arrangements, refugee status determination as well as integration matters. It is recommended that such legislation should ensure, inter alia, access by refugees and those with complementary forms of protection to national social welfare schemes. Such a law, which should be separate from the legislation governing immigration control related matters, should also clearly stipulate the rights and obligations of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as contain clear references related to the responsibilities of different authorities in asylum and refugee matters.

- Appropriate reception conditions for asylum-seekers

As mentioned above, asylum legislation should clearly stipulate the responsibility of Japan under the 1951 Convention to which Japan is a signatory; as part of this, it should highlight and confirm the responsibility of the State to provide the necessary support from the moment an asylum-seeker declares his/her intention to seek protection against persecution in Japan, be it at the border (airport or seaport) or within the territory.

As part of the overall arrangement related to reception conditions, the following should be taken into account:

- The issuance of proper identity cards for asylum-seekers be ensured for the period that the refugee status is being determined by the authorities;
- The state assistance scheme for asylum-seekers be reviewed to ensure that their basic needs, including necessary financial means, food, clothing, accommodation, and medical care are covered throughout the refugee status determination process, regardless of their residency status;
- Reception conditions be developed that reflect age, gender, and diversity sensitivity and which ensure adequate support for applicants with special needs (in particular, the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated children, victims of sexual violence, of trauma and torture and persons with disabilities need to be adequately taken care of);
- Pending a decision of the preliminary screening (including examination of admissibility of the re-application), the applicant be entitled to support and reception conditions on a par with regular asylum seekers; and,
- Asylum seekers be granted permission to work, if the length of the refugee status determination procedure exceeds 6 months.

-Detention of asylum-seekers and the use of Alternatives to Detention (ATD)

The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees define those to whom international refugee protection is to be conferred and establish key principles, including the non-penalization of illegal entry of persons in need of international protection.

Based on this, the detention of asylum-seekers and refugees should be avoided as a matter of principle and be a measure of last resort only. Fundamentally, asylum-seeking children should not be detained at all. ATD should be sought and given preference, in particular for certain categories of vulnerable persons. Should asylum-seekers be detained, they should be entitled to minimum procedural guarantees and minimum standards of treatment, such as appropriate medical treatment.

Based on the positive developments in relation to promoting ATD in Japan, including the Memorandum of Understanding that was concluded by the Immigration Bureau, the Forum for Refugees Japan (FRJ) and the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA), it is hoped that the use of ATD will be expanded further.

- Fair and efficient asylum procedures

Fair and efficient as well as transparent asylum procedures are critical to identify those who should benefit from international protection under the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol as well as other relevant international norms, in a speedy manner. With this in mind, the following core elements of a well-functioning asylum process – in keeping with international refugee protection principles – will need to be ensured: (1) the independence of the appeal process, (2) provision of legal support at all stages of the asylum process, (3) compilation and availability of independent, up-to-date, relevant and reliable country of origin information

as a basis for solid asylum decisions, (4) the provision of continuous training and capacity building of all actors involved in the asylum process, particularly the decision makers at all levels of the process, (5) the introduction of adequate legal provisions, including a clear set of criteria and procedural safeguards for the treatment of repeat applications and the granting of complementary forms of protection, (6) the allocation of sufficient financial and human resources to maintain an efficient RSD process, and, (7) well-established mechanisms that assure a consistent high quality of the decision making process.

As a general principle, proper interpretation and application of the eligibility criteria in the 1951 Convention must be fully guaranteed. In realizing this, UNHCR guidelines and international standards and principles should be duly considered and applied in the RSD decision making process.

In order to assist the Government of Japan to further increase the fairness and the efficiency of the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process and to clear existing backlogs of pending asylum claims, UNHCR stands ready to cooperate closely with the Ministry of Justice, for example in following areas: 1. Providing additional comprehensive training and capacity building opportunities for all officials involved in the RSD process at all levels; 2. Providing technical advice and training for the establishment of a dedicated country of origin unit within the Ministry of Justice; and, 3. Assisting with a joint review of cases in the first instance and the appeal process as part of targeted training and capacity building efforts.

It is in this regard that UNHCR looks forward to working with the Ministry of Justice in pursuing the recently agreed recommendations of the Sub-Committee as speedily as possible.

- Integration of refugees under a new comprehensive framework

For individuals recognized as a refugee, all necessary steps should be taken to ensure their smooth and speedy integration into Japanese society. Of particular importance in this regard is that the Government makes every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings for refugees and to reduce fees for acquiring citizenship. It is suggested that the Government develops a comprehensive integration support programme, with a clear responsibility allocation among different actors. In this regard it is considered important to forge close partnerships between central and local government entities, the municipalities, relevant civil society organizations and the refugees.

While those who are granted special permission to remain in Japan on humanitarian grounds are entitled to certain benefits, they should also be provided with a more comprehensive set of rights, including state assistance for their integration.

Those provided with complementary forms of protection should enjoy a formal legal status and should be granted the necessary civil, political, social and economic rights, such as the right to speedy family reunification.

Concerning family reunification, given that the right to family unity is one of the fundamental human rights refugees should be able to enjoy, UNHCR encourages the Government of Japan to consider separating social welfare issues from the issue of reunification of refugees and their families.

- Treatment of those who are found not to be in need of international protection

The treatment of individuals who have sought international protection and who, after due consideration of their claims in full and fair procedures, are found neither to qualify for Convention refugee status, nor to be in need of international protection on human rights and/or humanitarian grounds, plays an important factor in maintaining a credible refugee status determination system.

A legislative framework and effective system should be put in place that fairly and transparently regulates the treatment of rejected asylum-seekers who are not entitled to domestic protection or other rights to remain. Such a regulation may include the provision of counseling at the end of the RSD process, provisions for assisted voluntary return and an effective and transparent return monitoring system to ensure return in safety and dignity. The basic principle governing the treatment of such persons includes that they be treated in a humane manner and in full respect for their human rights and dignity.

3. Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission

In 2010, the Government of Japan initiated a resettlement pilot project as the first country in Asia and for the past five years, it has welcomed eighty-three refugees from Myanmar from the camps in Thailand. Following the pilot phase, a Cabinet agreement was adopted in January 2014 to start an official resettlement programme as from 2015. UNHCR welcomes the Government's decision and stands ready to provide support in whatever manner the Government considers necessary. UNHCR recommends that the Government implements the resettlement programme as flexibly as possible, including the application of its selection criteria, considering the humanitarian nature of the programme.

Given the dire global refugee situation, with an ever increasing number of new refugee emergencies, including the ongoing Syria crisis, it is hoped that the Government of Japan will favorably consider the admission of Syrian refugees on humanitarian grounds, in order to preserve the protection space for Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries, as an important sign of international burden and responsibility sharing. Such a humanitarian admission can take various forms, including through liberal visa arrangements and family reunification.

4. Statelessness

In support of UNHCR's global campaign to bring statelessness to an end within the next 10 years, which was launched by UNHCR in November 2014, it is hoped that Japan will consider acceding to the two Statelessness Conventions. Such a step would constitute a clear and important contribution to the campaign and would likely encourage other countries in the region to follow Japan's lead.

To work towards obtaining a clear picture on the patterns of statelessness and to estimate the number of stateless persons in Japan, it is recommended to embark on a mapping exercise related to statelessness in close cooperation with UNHCR. Furthermore, in order to standardize identification and registration of stateless persons, the establishment of a dedicated and centralized statelessness status determination procedure should be favorably considered.