The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines protracted refugee situations as those “in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile.”

**CAUSES OF PRS**

Protracted refugee situations stem from political impasses that prevent refugees from returning home voluntarily in safety and dignity, and from integrating into their countries of asylum. Such situations are the result of political action and inaction that fails to address the root causes of persecution and violence that led to flight, or to accept refugees as full members of their host communities. Most refugees living in protracted situations, including Afghans, Burmese, Somalis, and Iraqis, come from countries where conflict and persecution have persisted for years.

**CONSEQUENCES OF PRS**

Refugees in protracted refugee situations often face protection and human rights challenges, such as restricted movement or confinement in camps, sexual and physical violence, and lack of access to legal employment, police protection and systems of justice. Due to these restrictions, refugees may be unable to earn livelihoods and achieve full self-reliance and may become dependent on international assistance to fulfill basic needs such as food, potable water, shelter and health care. Tensions between refugees and their host communities over scarce resources can become a source of insecurity.

**SOLUTIONS TO PRS**

Resolving protracted situations requires at least one of the three durable solutions for refugees: 1) voluntary return to their home countries in safety and dignity; 2) local integration in their country of asylum; or 3) third country resettlement.
Ameliorating protracted refugee situations is a U.S. foreign policy goal and a humanitarian priority. The U.S. government supports international programs that address protracted refugee situations in every part of the world. To accelerate progress, the Department of State has led the development of strategies to strengthen U.S. diplomatic, assistance and resettlement efforts in six protracted refugee situations. These situations were selected based on the extent of deprivation among the populations, and on the U.S. government’s capacity to make a positive difference. In most situations, making a positive difference means achieving durable solutions. Where solutions remain elusive, it means enhancing the protection and living conditions of refugees where they reside.

**The Six Focus Situations**

**Afghans in Pakistan:** Although over five million Afghan refugees have repatriated from Pakistan and Iran since 2002, Pakistan continues to host some 1.7 million registered Afghans, the majority of whom have resided there since the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan three decades ago.

**Bhutanese in Nepal:** Over 100,000 ethnic Nepalese refugees from Bhutan were living in camps in southeastern Nepal since the early 1990s. Since 2007, more than 35,000 of these refugees have been resettled to the United States, and over 6,000 more to Australia, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

**Burmese in Thailand:** Roughly 150,000 Burmese refugees live in nine official camps on the Thai-Burma border, including an estimated 50,000 who have not been registered. Many refugees have lived in these camps for more than 25 years. Third-country resettlement has provided durable solutions for more than 60,000 Burmese refugees since 2005, with 50,000 of these refugees resettled to the United States.

**Croatians and Bosnians in Serbia:** More than 73,000 refugees from the time of the Yugoslav Wars (52,000 from Croatia) are still displaced throughout Serbia, fifteen years after the signing of the Dayton Accords. The United States is working with UNHCR and the countries of the region to reach agreement that offers a durable solution to those still in need, including the right to return or receive assistance with local integration.

**Liberians in West Africa:** Liberia’s civil war produced several waves of refugees who at one point numbered over 700,000. The United States has resettled more than 30,000 Liberian refugees. The invocation of the cessation clause for refugees will likely compel remaining Liberian refugees in West Africa to take advantage of local integration or assisted repatriation.

**Somalis in Kenya:** Somali refugees have fled to Kenya in significant waves since the early 1990s. More than 285,000 Somali refugees are registered in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. The Kakuma Camp also hosts some 44,000 Somali refugees.