



BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION



PRM STAKEHOLDER MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2011 FINAL REPORT

Introduction

As part of the Bureau's efforts to engage civil society in a dialogue about the challenges we all face in our humanitarian assistance work, PRM organized a day-long meeting on September 9 with key external stakeholders. Approximately 45 senior representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other U.S. government offices attended to take a look "under the hood" of PRM, assess our performance in key areas and jointly look at where we are going. Event sessions were designed around the following key areas: the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance; protection; protracted refugee situations; internally displaced persons (IDPs); engagement with external stakeholders; international migration; and U.S. refugee admissions. A number of key conclusions emerged that will inform the Bureau's work – and our engagement with counterparts in government and the international community – in the coming years and provide the foundation for future engagement with our partners on the challenges of assisting some of the world's most vulnerable people.

Key Conclusions

1. **Humanitarian diplomacy is essential.** Whether it is Iraq, Pakistan, Kenya or Colombia, the efforts of the State Department to encourage governments to address humanitarian needs and promote access for humanitarian agencies has had a positive impact on the lives of millions of refugees, conflict victims, and vulnerable migrants. Stakeholders were particularly supportive of PRM's approach toward multilateral engagement; noting that by dealing with "multilateralism on multilateral terms," the Bureau can systemically impact and enhance the character and effectiveness of those institutions. This is a critical strength that PRM offers in our international diplomatic efforts to improve global humanitarian response.
2. **PRM should continue to define its humanitarian mandate broadly.** PRM should continue to work with victims of persecution, conflict-induced displacement, and statelessness, and should work harder with our partners to meet the needs of urban refugees and migrants who face unique challenges due to xenophobia, labor exploitation, etc. A number of stakeholders felt that PRM should support UNHCR's role in protection in natural disasters, asking "if not UNHCR, who?" Participants challenged PRM and UNHCR to be more vocal with host governments about solutions to these difficult issues. Many pointed to the need to protect, assist and advocate for

vulnerable migrants/populations who are not necessary refugees under the Convention – victims of human trafficking, crime, xenophobia, natural disasters, and political conflict, among others.

3. **PRM must be bolder on protection.** Outside the U.S. government, PRM could be bolder and more vocal on persuading host governments to address protection issues for refugees and internally displaced populations, including facilitating humanitarian access. Within the U.S. government, protection is an issue that is not always well understood and PRM should seek to ensure that all parts of the government reinforce the protection agenda.
4. **The Department should move forward on QDDR implementation.** Implementing QDDR conclusions related to conflict prevention and response will help to ensure that the U.S. government speaks with one voice.
5. **The Bureau’s work in protracted refugee situations is critical.** PRM has a unique leadership position, programs, and policy focus to make a difference in these situations. Stakeholders urged more focused implementation of PRM’s protracted refugee strategy, through greater engagement and innovation in certain areas, especially the need to examine protracted refugee situations from a development and urban planning or migration management lens, as opposed to an emergency response framework. Second and third generation refugees may not be interested in or have the skills to work in the agricultural sector as did their parents and grandparents, so our interventions should equip refugee youth with the skills they need to maintain urban livelihoods. There is clearly a need to



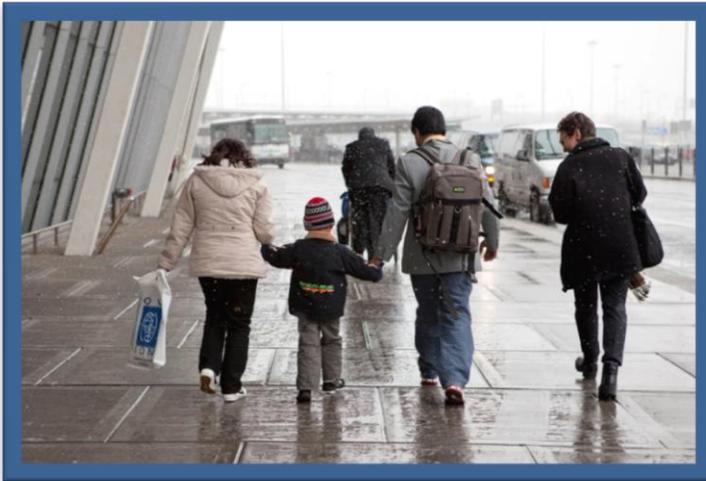
Somali families in Kenya
Photo courtesy of Department of State

move beyond the traditional three durable solutions to pursue hybrid and alternative approaches, such as migration and border management systems, documentation and regularization of status, or self-reliance strategies (which will require the participation of development partners). Participants pointed out that refugees often find their own durable solutions, so we should learn from them and perhaps study resilience instead of vulnerability.

6. **In close collaboration with other U.S. agencies, PRM should strengthen its work on in IDP policy and response.** The first objective should be to strengthen PRM’s own capacity, given the extent to which PRM programs support IDPs. Second, PRM should seek to strengthen U.S. government inter-agency collaboration. And third, the U.S. government must strengthen the international response. The overarching challenge facing the Bureau and UNHCR is how to do more for IDPs without degrading protection and assistance for refugees, especially in today’s difficult budget climate. It is also increasingly clear that we need to bring development actors into IDP situations early on, to provide much needed assistance to host communities and to bridge the “relief to development” gap. At the same time, the U.S. government must reinforce the role of states in protecting their own populations.

7. **PRM should continue to strengthen its international migration policy and program activities.** Stakeholders welcomed significant PRM policy and program efforts to define and implement an international migration mission statement and strategy, but they urged further efforts to strengthen the overall program. These should include more support for victims of trafficking and other vulnerable migrants and for building capacity in migrant producing and receiving countries, more data collection and research, and increased efforts to develop best practices among like-minded governments. A key challenge is that “refugee” is a well-understood term which immediately evokes compassion while “migrant” can refer to voluntary movements, or have a negative connotation, as in the case of irregular migration – yet many migrants are highly vulnerable and deserve no less protection than other populations at risk. Libya is an example where even migrants who arrived by regular means had suffered serious abuses. There is also the increasing phenomenon of “survival migration,” with individuals leaving their countries of origin to avoid destitution or other suffering that would be life-threatening. Optimal outcomes on migration are beyond the scope of unilateral action and therefore we must engage with other countries as well as the private sector, unions, and local organizations. Serious and sustained U.S. engagement in international fora is a key opportunity for our government to lead on migration issues.

8. **The U.S. should maintain a robust refugee admissions program.** Our admissions program communicates to refugee-hosting countries our commitment to do our fair share and encourages them to sustain first asylum, while also encouraging other resettlement countries to do their part.



A refugee family arrives in the U.S.
Photo courtesy of IOM

Some participants urged PRM to be more aggressive and strategic in using its resettlement program as leverage with host governments and suggested that we could do more to press European countries to increase refugee resettlement. Without compromising security, we must also address significant processing delays and other challenges resulting from new screening procedures, as these have seriously impacted *bona fide* claimants to the program. Some participants raised concerns about deteriorating conditions for vulnerable refugees and highlighted the need for durable solutions for people who are in security check “limbo” for extended periods. Another key issue is the long term welfare of refugees who have been resettled in the United

States. While PRM does not have the primary responsibility for this, we work closely with our U.S. government colleagues to improve support for new arrivals. We also need to continue to work with our NGO partners and other stakeholders to ensure refugee voices are heard and there is public understanding of the admissions program.

9. **Our language must resonate beyond the Beltway.** Making the strategic case for humanitarian aid (e.g., linking it to political stability) may be effective in budget discussions within the U.S. government, but the moral case for assistance is clearly most compelling to the Congress and the

general public. PRM public education resources are limited, and participants emphasized that many stakeholders can and should engage in public education efforts, including through engagement of new communities, such as young people. There was also discussion of the Department's commitment to use new technologies to increase outreach efforts, to describe the situations we encounter in our work and to bring that reality into the daily lives of Americans. One participant urged that PRM improve its website and make it more user-friendly. PRM staff noted that we are moving forward with website enhancements and the use of social media.

10. PRM should continue to broaden its outreach initiatives. The Bureau's efforts at transparency and public outreach have been well received – they enhance understanding of humanitarian response efforts and augment the capacity of stakeholder to contribute to this important work. During and after the transition to a new Assistant Secretary, the Bureau should sustain momentum in this area.

11. The U.S. government must practice at home what we preach abroad. Recent State Department efforts to advocate for improved conditions for vulnerable migrants, regardless of their immigration status, and to increase assistance to new refugee arrivals in the United States are valuable, in and of themselves. But they have also been very important to our credibility when speaking internationally on refugee protection issues. This extends beyond PRM and the wider State Department. The whole U.S. government needs to understand and support humanitarian law and principles.



Burmese boys in Thailand carry rations.
Photo courtesy of Hoa Tran, Program Officer, PRM

Next Steps

Participants told the Assistant Secretary and Bureau staff they believed the event was extremely useful: it enabled PRM to hear firsthand from partners and stakeholders about what the Bureau is doing well and where we need to do better. The information and insights gathered will be critical for PRM as we continue to navigate challenging issues such as the crisis in the Horn of Africa and displacement and refugee flows in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region. We look forward to continuing this robust dialogue with civil society, both through ongoing individual contacts and dialogues, as well as with similar sessions in the future.