



LOCAL NEWS

Vast majority of refugees in developing countries

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KUWAIT: The world commemorated World Refugee Day on June 20. On this occasion, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) marked this day in Kuwait at its premises in Mishref yesterday. This year's celebration was titled "Real People and Real Needs." The UNHCR annual report shows 42 million people uprooted worldwide. "The number of people forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution worldwide stood at 42 million at the end of last year amid a sharp slowdown in repatriation and more prolonged conflicts resulting in protracted displacement. The total includes 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million internally displaced people

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uprooted within their own countries, according to UNHCR's annual "Global Trends" report," said Wahid Bin Omar, representative of UNHCR during his opening statement.

The new report says 80 percent of the world's refugees are in developing nations. "The vast majority of internally displaced people - a population with whom the UN refugee agency is increasingly involved with - are in the same area. Many have been uprooted for years with no end in sight. Although the overall total of 42 million uprooted people at year's end represents a drop of about 700,000 over the previous year, new displacement in 2009 has already more than offset the decline," he added.

About 2 million refugees and internally displaced people (IDP) were able to return home in 2008, a decline from the year before. "Refugee repatriation (604,000) was down 17 percent, while IDP returns (1.4 million) dropped by 34 percent. Traditionally the largest durable solution for refugees, it was the second-lowest repatriation total in 15 years," he said.

This is an indication that the large-scale repatriation movements observed in the past have decelerated," the report said, noting that an estimated 11 million refugees have returned home over the past 10 years - most of them with UNHCR assistance. UNHCR helped 121,000 individuals resettle in other countries in 2008, and more than 67,000 departed to their new homelands with the agency's help," Bin Omar said.

Unfortunately, the efforts of many authorities, including the UNHCR, cannot fill all the needs of the refugees. The UNHCR made a survey focusing on the unfilled needs of the refugees, internally displaced people, returnees and those without nationality. The results showed that 30 percent of their needs are not filled, and one third of these needs are basic," he stated.

The employees of UNHCR are facing many problems. "Two of our employees were killed in Pakistan during the past five months alone. How can we uphold our duty in catering to the needs of millions of refugees around the world and make sure our employees are safe as well?" he asked.

June 20 is a good opportunity to remember the 42 million uprooted people all over the world who are waiting to return home. "Our goal is to ensure that the needs of the refugees won't be forgotten. Kuwait has increased its support from \$200,000 per year to \$2 million per year since 2008. This is a great increase and we thank the officials here and we hope it will increase even more. I also want to thank all of the other participating bodies from NGOs, Islamic, and humanitarian societies supporting our work," Bin Omar concluded.

Other organization working under the umbrella of the United Nations are also working on this issue. Representatives of these organizations also attended the ceremony and presented their speech. The International Organization for

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Migration (IOM) works with the UNHCR. Iman Ereqat, the Program Administrator and Finance Coordinator, presented a speech which provided facts about the IOM and described it as the transit stop for delivering the needs of refugees.

Representatives of other organizations also gave speeches on the role of their organizations and their cooperation with UNHCR. Mubarak Al-Adwani represented the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Thabit Al-Haroun represented the International Labor Organization (ILO), and professor Tariq Al-Sheikh represented the UN Habitat. Some organizations and individuals were awarded by the United Nations. The ceremony was concluded with an art exhibition by Sinan Hussain.

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