



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



## UN Refugee Agency helps 200,000 vulnerable Afghans during cold winter months

Kabul, 27 December 2011 – Winter is often the worst time of year for very vulnerable displaced Afghan families. However, once again, UNHCR and its partners are delivering winter supplies to help these families, whether returning refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), face the freezing temperatures.

As part of a coordinated response, together with Afghan authorities and other aid agencies, UNHCR will provide around 34,500 Afghan families – more than 200,000 individuals – with blankets, plastic sheets, fuel, and warm clothes such as sweaters, shawls, gloves, socks and waterproof shoes to stay warm and dry.

UNHCR has already purchased and pre-positioned winter supplies - over 207,000 blankets and 69,000 plastic sheets, together with 34,500 packages of warm clothing, and fuel (gas, charcoal, coal and firewood) for country-wide distribution. Pre-positioning is especially important in areas, such as Badghis and Ghor, where heavy snow can slow down access to families in need.

These packs will be distributed to 9,000 newly returned Afghan refugee families in eastern and south-eastern regions (which received most of the newly returned Afghan refugees this year); 6,000 families in the north and north-eastern regions; 7,000 families in the western region; 6,500 families in the south; and more than 6,000 families in the central and central highlands regions.

“This joint UNHCR – MoRR winter assistance programme is vital for returnees and IDPs who are at particular risk during the cold winter months here in Afghanistan,” explained Jamaher Anwary, Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation as distribution for over 300 families got under way today in Deb Sabz district. The distribution of winter relief supplies, with the coordination and support of the Departments of Refugees, Provincial Disaster Management Committee and the provincial officials in Nimroz and Paktiya provinces, has already been completed. Last week 1,800 vulnerable families living in Paktia and 350 families in Zaranj received winter assistance while families living in Balkh, Faryab, Samangan, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul and Baghlan provinces received their packages earlier. Vulnerable families living in the eastern, southern and central provinces will soon be receiving theirs.

This winter, many more families will receive help as a result of UNHCR raising awareness among agencies and the private sector and urging donors to direct their assistance to needy communities such as IDPs in Ghazni, or new refugee returnees arriving in Logar and Wardak.

As in previous years, the UN refugee agency’s assistance focuses on isolated rural places of high return. Places which may not be so well-known or frequented by aid agencies and are often located in poorly accessible areas.

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“The purpose of distributing this assistance is to help needy returnees and IDPs cope better during the bitter winter months. By this I mean households that are run by women with no adult male support, families with elderly or disabled members, families with many children... In other words, really poor or desperately disadvantaged families who are in dire need of our support,” said Peter Nicolaus, UNHCR Representative in Afghanistan.

UNHCR has helped around 4.6 million Afghan refugees voluntarily return home since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, but there are nearly 3 million registered Afghan refugees who are still living in exile today in Pakistan and Iran. Unfortunately the present environment of scarce jobs, food, and shelter coupled with a deteriorating situation in some parts of Afghanistan, is creating more and more challenges to returnees who are re-settling back in their places of origin. These conditions also discourage other refugees from wanting to return home.

The Government of Afghanistan is now engaged, together with UNHCR, in a unique quadripartite consultative process - involving its neighbours, Iran and Pakistan - to develop a multi-year solutions strategy for Afghan refugees. This strategy will be formally presented to the international community at a conference in April 2012.

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