



UNHCR supports displaced Afghans regain their land in partnership with Norwegian Refugee Council

KABUL, Afghanistan, 25 May 2009 – The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) extended this week a partnership agreement with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an international non-governmental organization, to expand efforts to help strengthen protection for returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan.

UNHCR supports NRC to provide free legal aid and information services to Afghan returnees and IDPs in 8 locations through Information and Legal Aid Centers (ILACs) and mobile teams.

The UNHCR funded program is expected to assist 150,000 Afghans in 2009 by providing information and legal services through a network of Information and Legal Assistance Centers (ILACs) and supporting the capacity building of at least 200 key professionals involved in the formal and informal justice systems existing in Afghanistan.

The partnership agreement, which became a regional programme in 2007, provides free access to information and legal services for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, seeking durable solutions to displacement.

Since March 2003 until the end of 2008, a total of 4066 legal cases were assisted, together with referrals of protection and assistance concerns to NGOs, UN agencies and government institutions across the country. Land and property disputes are some of the greatest barriers to return of displaced Afghans, with NRC working on between 600 and 800 land cases every year. NRC also assists with cases involving inheritance and family law.

Depending on the number of returning Afghans, this year (2009), through the legal aid centres, some 5000 information cases will be registered and processed including with the cross border component. Furthermore, NRC will conduct some 800 community visits by trained information counsellors to provide updated information to IDPs and returnees. The estimated number of beneficiaries from the legal assistance in 2009 will be some 4800 individuals.

Training of community leaders and legal professionals has also been a priority over the past five years. IN 2009 NRC will train 200 professionals on sound legal practices through capacity building training seminars and workshop. In 2008, NRC trained 830 community leaders and 327 formal officials in 12 provinces.

"The services provided through NRC's ICLA work are highly effective and unique to NRC. NRC, with the support of UNHCR, assists returnees, refugees and IDPs with their housing, land and property claims and with inheritance cases.

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"We are very happy to have extended the contract which will help us reach a higher number of Afghans in desperate need of assistance and provide a service that makes a tangible and sustainable change to the lives of Afghans who have been displaced." Says Niamh Murnaghan, NRC's Regional Director.

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