



# UN BULLETIN

June  
July  
2010

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United Nations Office in Belarus



Helping Refugees to Build  
Their Futures

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**Front cover photo:** Kosovar refugees fleeing their homeland, March 1999. UN Photo/R LeMoy

**UN BULLETIN**

United Nations Office in Belarus

June-July 2010



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## Belarus to Receive a Grant to Fight AIDS and TB

On 21 May the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria together with UNDP signed an Agreement that the Global Fund will extend to the Republic of Belarus US\$ 17 million to fight TB and US\$ 7.5 million to fight HIV in 2010–2013.

This second large grant to fight TB (the first one was awarded in October 2007) will strengthen national capacity in this area. For the period 2007-2015 Belarus will have received a total of US\$ 35-38 million for anti-TB interventions. The key focus will be on support for patients with multi-drug resistant infections. Over the course of five years, 2600 patients will be covered by appropriate



forms of treatment. The new HIV/AIDS grant also follows a first grant (implemented in 2004–2009). It is aimed at improving HIV prevention among various population categories. For the period 2004 and 2015, Belarus will have received a total of US\$ 64 million for combating HIV-infection.

### “Give Up Smoking – Breathe Easily!”

An action dedicated to World No Tobacco Day was held on 30-31 May in Belarusian cities. Participants were given the opportunity not only to give up smoking, but also to win a prize – a T-shirt with the slogan “Breathe Easily!”.



On 31 May, inhabitants of Minsk saw the “I can stop TB!” bus running in the centre of the city. The “Breathe Easily!” action is a part of the “I can stop TB!” information campaign, within the framework of the grant project of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria entitled “Support for the National Tuberculosis Programme in the Republic of Belarus”. The project is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. The action was organised by the Belarusian Red Cross Society.

## UN to Establish New Gender Agency

At its 64th Session the UN General Assembly approved a resolution on system-wide coherence within the organisation. Among other things, it provides for the establishment of a composite entity for gender equality and empowerment of women.

“The UN General Assembly resolves by the present Resolution to establish a composite entity of the United Nations Organisation on gender equality and empowerment of women which will be called “UN Women”...”, says the Resolution.

The new entity will be assigned mandates and responsibilities currently performed by the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. The new entity is expected to start working by 1 January 2011.

## Uneven Progress in Attaining Millennium Development Goals

A new report on the progress made in achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals was presented in New York. The report will serve as a basis for discussion at the Summit to be held in New York on 20–22 September 2010. The Summit will discuss the acceleration of progress in achieving the goals, which were set ten years ago.

Presenting the Report, Ban Ki-moon stated that 920 million people worldwide will live in extreme poverty by 2015, a two-fold decrease compared with 1990. The first goal will thus be achieved. However, much greater efforts are still needed, especially in reducing unemployment and maternal and child mortality.

The Millennium Development Goals Report is a joint effort of 25 UN agencies. It was released on the eve of the G8 and G20 Summits.



# A Conversation with Journalists about Sexual and Reproductive Health in Belarus

**Whenever someone uses the word 'family', they usually have in mind a meaning which is never exactly identical to the understanding that others have of that word. It is a very personal word. The family is the place where one's life first begins, where our first mistakes and successes are made; it is the place where many find their happiness and peace – or on the contrary, discouragement and frustration. Family life, whether positive or not, constantly requires energy and effort in order to achieve mutual respect and patience, in order to accept people the way they are. The family is the locus of information exchange, where we acquire the knowledge to make the choices that will safeguard the health and well-being of everyone in the family. Central to this are the behaviour patterns and roles of each family member.**

The communication strategy of the Belarus country office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) includes reaching each and every person through high quality materials transmitted via the mass media, and ensuring that professional journalists are well-informed about UNFPA's spheres of activity and support its views. On 4 May 2010 – the eve of International Family Day - the United Nations



Journalists discussing family issues

Population Fund in Belarus invited a pool of journalists who cover the fund's mandated topics to a chat-in about family issues, including family planning, sexual and reproductive health and gender dynamics. The meeting took place in the republican Centre for Science and Practice "Mother and Child". Within an informal set-up, female journalists discussed these issues with national experts, including family planning specialist Ms. Alla Kamlyuk, sexual therapist Mr. Dmitry Kapustin and family psychologist Ms. Elena Zenevich.

The aim of the meeting was to provide the journalists with the opportunity to consult with experts on a number of issues and ask not only general questions, but personal ones as well, in order to have the necessary information for their everyday family lives.

Ms. Alla Kamlyuk explained in detail the functioning of a woman's reproductive system. Furthermore, she took some time to explain the use of hormonal contraception including the contraceptive pill, because in Belarus many people do not believe in the effectiveness of the pill, basing their opinions on rumours and the judgments of others. She explained to the journalists why the choice of modern contraception used should be advised by a specialist and not by a pharmacist. According to Ms. Kamlyuk, although in recent years the number of planned pregnancies has risen, unexpected pregnancies still constitute approximately 40 percent of all pregnancies.

The factors that contribute to sexual and reproductive health problems were explained and the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle during adolescence was emphasised. "Reproductive cells are very sensitive. They can be affected by a person's behaviour from an early age. Smoking and alcohol abuse can be very critical and contribute to future infertility", said Ms. Kamlyuk.

Sex therapist Dmitry Kapustin noted that fewer than 5 percent of Belarusians who experience problems with sexual health go to see a professional. Mr. Kapustin explains this by the fact that people's attitudes to their sexual health have become less responsible than previously. Many people prefer to solve their sexual and reproductive health problems by buying 'wonder remedies' or changing sexual partners. They are afraid of the possible public stigma, ashamed of their problems, do not trust the national healthcare system and fear the possible revelation of more serious illnesses. Sexual and reproductive roles are developed in the very early months of life. Sexual behaviour depends on how one is raised, the information one receives and the quality of the sexual and reproductive health services that are accessible. "My son is 11. What does he know about sex?" – asked a correspondent of the national youth newspaper "Znany Yunosti" Natallia Uriadova. The sex therapist then provided advice on when and how parents should begin to teach sex education to their children.

Despite the apparent gender-equality in Belarus, where women are attaining high levels of education and are actively involved in all spheres of social life, patriarchal norms are still common in many households. After returning home from work, wives cook, clean, and deal with the children - help them with their homework, play and teach them. Women constitute 80 per cent of all persons applying for family counselling. The family counsellor discussed with journalists how they may enhance communication with their husbands and how to encourage their male partners to get involved in household activities.

Although the meeting lasted for a long time beyond normal working hours, the journalists refrained from going home and continued to ask more questions. Of course, they are not just journalists after all - they are current and future girlfriends, wives, mothers and grandmothers. Each one of them has her own notion of 'family', every one of them wants to be part of a happy family and enjoy the process of building one...

# Our Planet Needs Us Every Day

**“Diversity of species. One planet. One future” is the slogan of World Environment Day, celebrated every year on 5 June. It was proclaimed at the 27th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 and is intended to draw the attention of the global community to environmental concerns and to urge political interest and an appropriate response.**

**Belarus has celebrated World Environment Day since 1973.**

In its Resolution the General Assembly urges governments and UN agencies to organise events on this day which demonstrate their commitments to the conservation and improvement of the environment. Such events are held in Belarus regularly, and not only on this day!

A workshop presenting the eco-tourism capacity of the natural reserves of the Belarusian Polesie was held on 21–22 May in Brest Oblast. Representatives of the leading national tourist companies and mass media got acquainted with the eco-tourism capacity of the Belarusian Polesie. This opportunity was provided by the joint project of UNDP and the Global Environment Facility “Catalysing the sustainability of the wetland protected area system in Belarusian Polesie”. The Project has supported 15 local initiatives for the development of the eco-tourism infrastructure in the Bioroza, Drahi yn, Pinsk, Luninec, Stolin and Žytkavicy districts. The Project has also helped to renovate and equip four ecological education centres and establish four ecological trails on the territory of the nature reserve.

On 21 May an ecological event was organised by the project team of the EU/UNDP Project “Capacity building for strategic environmental assessment and environmental conventions implementation in Belarus”, in conjunction with the Belarusian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. Students of the Dom arcyz secondary school, alongside representatives of the EU/UNDP Project team, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, local authorities and the Berezinsky Nature Reserve, made and affixed 40 birdhouses and 10 houses for night bats, and held contests for the best slogan about biodiversity conservation and the best decoration of a birdhouse or night bat shelter.

During his opening remarks, EU/UNDP Project Manager Dmitry Frischin said “the project aims to involve the young generation in ecological campaigns, to help children adopt a caring attitude towards nature and ecology, and to inform about the basics of sustainable development”.

Two Information Centres for Sustainable Development and Eco-Tourism, established within the framework of the EU/UNDP Joint Project “Sustainable Development at the Local Level”, were opened on 11–12 June in Navapolack and Zaborje village (in the Rasonski District of Viciebsk Oblast).

The Centres are expected to conduct research, to organise information and training workshops and to provide access to a library on sustainable development. The Centres will facilitate the exchange of experience between partners from Belarus and neighbouring countries and will help the Belarusian regions develop Local Agendas-21 and Green Routes.

It is expected that by the end of the year another three centres – in avusy, Bielaaziorsk and Žaludok – will be opened under the project.

The continuing development of eco-tourism, focusing on environmental concerns, and holding long-term and regular events aimed at biodiversity conservation – these are the only efforts which will improve the environmental situation in Belarus and worldwide.



Opening of the information centre for sustainable development and ecotourism, Navapolack, June 2010

# International Humanitarian Law in the Focus of “Youth for Peace” Competition

**The 5th International Law Competition “Youth for Peace” was held on 18–22 May 2010 at the sport and recreation centre of Belarus' Trade Unions Federation in Ratamka village. The main objective of the Competition was to disseminate knowledge about international humanitarian law.**

The event was organised by the International Institute of Labour and Social Relations, which has managed within a relatively short period of time to significantly expand the geographical coverage of the Competition. Whereas in 2006 teams from just three countries (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) took part, this year the number of participating countries was 4 times greater. The Competition brought together students from Russia, France, Singapore, China, India, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Latvia. Future diplomats and lawyers, judges and legal advisors, ministers and ombudsmen demonstrated their knowledge of international humanitarian and public law.

This year the topics of the Competition were “Law of armed conflict and the environment” and “Law of armed conflict in the activities of international organisations”. The Competition involved a number of phases, with theoretical and practical assignments in which the participants were tasked with demonstrating sound knowledge of international law and the ability to make decisions in different situations of armed conflict, as well as showing teamwork skills.

During the Competition the participants addressed a whole range of urgent issues of the international agenda, such as strengthening intercultural dialogue and tolerance among nations, applying International Humanitarian Law to armed conflicts and preserving the environment and biodiversity.

All these issues have been on the United Nations agenda since its establishment and continue to be in the focus of today's efforts. The UN Charter, signed by all UN founding members, calls for “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”.

Now in the 21st century, we see new challenges which are very often totally different from those which existed in 1945, when the United Nations came into being. The proliferation of armed conflicts within states has become the most striking security phenomenon since the end of the Cold War.

Armed conflicts have a devastating influence on the lives of millions of women and children. Children and their families are being targeted. In the past decade alone, an estimated 2 million children have been killed in armed conflicts. The proportion of civilians killed during armed conflicts has increased from one in ten at the beginning of the twentieth century to approximately nine in ten at its end.

Human rights have gained a leading role in international law during the last decade, and we are now witnessing a new and extremely close interrelation between two basic sets of international legal norms – human rights and humanitarian law – in relation to armed conflicts.



Youth competition grand final

In 1996 the International Court of Justice affirmed for the first time in its practice the applicability of International Human Rights Law during international and internal armed conflicts, pointing to the relationship between the two main bodies of law. Other international courts have followed this tendency and applied the human rights treaties to situations of armed conflict.

Recently, the Human Rights Committee affirmed that there was “no need to choose one branch of law over another”, and that they may be applied simultaneously. This means that International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law are two branches of law that have a common objective of protecting persons, and “they should be harmonised and interpreted in a way such that they complement and reinforce each other”.

All these new developments in the application of the two international laws give us hope for more successful resolution of conflicts, stronger human security and more lasting peace.

# Maria Sharapova Visits Belarus

On 30 June Maria Sharapova, Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Development Programme, arrived in Belarus directly from Wimbledon to visit the Chernobyl-affected areas. The tennis star came to the Homie Region, where her charitable foundation has helped finance a number of UNDP youth projects.

The tennis champion became a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador in 2007. Her role is to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, with a particular focus on enhanced rehabilitation of the Chernobyl-affected areas. Among other UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors are football stars Ronaldo (Brazil), Zinedine Zidane (France) and Didier Drogba (Côte d'Ivoire). It should be noted that Maria Sharapova was almost born Belarusian – her family left Homie just a couple of months before her birth. So after finishing her official visit, Maria also went to see some relatives.

Maria Sharapova's Foundation has supported seven youth projects in partnership with UNDP, implemented in the affected regions of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, and is also financing a programme of scholarships in Belarus for students from radioactively contaminated areas.

Maria Sharapova announced the opening of the US\$ 210,000 scholarship programme in 2008. The programme is a joint initiative of Maria Sharapova's Foundation and UNDP. Grants are intended to



The district hospital in Minsk (where 16,000 people reside) is a unique health facility where Maria Sharapova's Foundation has supported the establishment of the "Fairytale" therapeutic room for children. Lights, music and toys – all these help a child recover without tablets or injections.



help 12 talented young people from the Chernobyl affected regions to attend a full-time course of studies at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts and Belarusian State University. The goal of the programme is to help talented students.

"Maria Sharapova's work will send a message of optimism to young people from a region which used to be in recession and where a return to normal life is now becoming a reality", – said Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator.

Maria's visit to Belarus had been in planning for three years, but was postponed several times because of medical treatment after a shoulder injury and her intensive tournament schedule. Yet, in the end, Maria managed to visit the Homie region. She spent about a day there: she visited the Minsk Centre for Children's Creative Activities, where children study ecology and participate in the town improvement works, and the Minsk district hospital which uses a therapeutic approach to address stress. In Homie itself, she met with students receiving scholarships funded by her Foundation and gave a tennis master-class.

During her visit to the Homie Region, Maria Sharapova announced that she would donate another US\$ 250,000 for the implementation of projects intended to address post-Chernobyl problems in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. The initiative will be implemented in 2011–2012. Antonius Broek, UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus, stressed that this has a symbolic significance because next year is the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. The funds will be spent on expanding UNDP-supported initiatives involving sport and physical training events for young people in the Chernobyl-affected areas.

Maria Sharapova said that despite the problems caused by the 1986 disaster, in Homie she saw "progress, and children with the potential for achieving even greater successes. All they need is hard work and self-confidence. I have already supported initiatives in the health and education sectors and now I am very pleased to start supporting sport and physical training events that contribute to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle".

# Helping Refugees to Build Their Futures

**Every year since 2001, the international community has celebrated World Refugee Day on 20 June. This year's celebrations were held under the theme "Home", in recognition of the drastic situation of more than 43 million displaced persons all over the world, of whom about 15 million are refugees. The main goal of World Refugee Day is to bring attention to the difficult situation of refugees and to urge the global community on their behalf to provide them with the assistance they need. It is important that people not only consider what it is like to be among those millions of refugees, but also help them start a new life and find a place they can call home.**

The recent report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says that over four in every five refugees are living in developing countries, and their number in urban areas is increasingly growing. Similarly to the global population, most refugees live in cities. Due to the unusually rapid increase in the number of refugees, they now constitute one of the most vulnerable population categories in the world. To meet their needs, new forms of partnership are required, especially with municipalities and assistance programmes. Refugees need more assistance in learning languages, receiving an education and finding employment.

Nine years ago Belarus joined the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Since then the Government has made impressive progress in elaborating and improving the national legislation regarding asylum and the definition of refugee status, providing additional assistance to refugees and providing humanitarian aid in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Speaking at a press conference dedicated to World Refugee Day, the UNHCR Representative in Belarus Sholeh Safavi noted that, just five years ago, more than a million refugees were able to return home voluntarily. However, conflicts all over the world have now become more protracted and, consequently, only a quarter of a million out of the 15 million refugees were able to return to their homes last year. This is the lowest annual rate of voluntary return recorded in the last 20 years. Unfortunately, this means that 15 million people worldwide will remain refugees for a longer period of time, needing international protection and support.

The UNHCR Representative gave a positive appraisal of Belarus' efforts in elaborating a progressive regulatory and legal framework on refugee-related issues and ensuring a modern system of asylum which offers refugees secure international protection and a safe place of residence.

Sergei Matus, Deputy Head of the Department for Citizenship and Migration at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, stated that technical assistance worth approximately US\$ 7 million has been provided to Belarusian

government agencies under international TA projects within the framework of cooperation between the Department for Citizenship and Migration and UNHCR. UNHCR has also assisted in establishing and equipping four temporary accommodation centres for asylum-seekers in Viciebsk, Homie, Brest and at Minsk National Airport.

According to Yuri Fedorov, Head of the International Cooperation Department of the State Border Guard Committee, fourteen persons who crossed the border applied for refugee status in Belarus during the first five months of 2010. Among them are citizens of Georgia, Afghanistan, Poland, Pakistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

## World Refugee Day in Belarus

On the eve of World Refugee Day, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Belarus, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus and the "Evrika" Centre for Creative Activities for Children and Young People organised a nationwide contest of creative works entitled "Under One Sun". More than 1600 drawings, posters, essays and poems sent in by children from all regions of the country were dedicated to the problems of refugees. 100 outstanding works were



Refugee children and Belarusian youngsters at the Gala concert devoted to the World Refugee Day, June 2010

**My homeland, my country gives true love.  
Like the sun it gives warm-heartedness to everyone.  
Let friendship shine throughout the planet,  
Let children and adults live in happiness!  
Let the world be smiling and beautiful!  
And everyone will find a place under the shining sun.**

Maria Solomko,  
a participant of the children's contest

exhibited in the National Historical Museum of Belarus, the Viciebsk Oblast Local History Museum and the Museum of History in Homie . At the award ceremony, refugee children and Belarusian youngsters performed together at the Gala concert, demonstrating that there is enough space for all under one sun. Experience suggests that such contests teach children tolerance and mercy.

On 10–11 June the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus hosted the Fourth “New Horizon” International Contest on the Rights of Refugees, which brought together contestants from the Academies of the Ministries of Internal Affairs of Belarus, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The programme included various tasks, such as a story highlighting the problems of refugees in the region and a practical contest called “A Refugee’s Journey”. The winning team was from the Border Guard Faculty of the Belarusian Military Academy; a team from the Academy of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs won second place; and third place was awarded to a team from the Kiev National University of Internal Affairs.

A roundtable conference on tolerance and multicultural education was held on 15 June within the framework of the TA Project “Integration of Refugees in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (Phase I)”. It was attended by representatives of the National Education Institute, the Minsk Municipal Institute for Education Development, the Academy of Postgraduate Education, the Department for Citizenship and Migration of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Minsk District Departments for Education, as well as deputy directors of schools providing education services to refugees and foreigners.

The conference included a discussion focusing on the integration of refugees, foreign citizens and persons without citizenship in Belarusian society, and also presentations on various facilities and tools developed by UN and intergovernmental organisations which are intended to promote multicultural education and diversity.

### UNHCR Projects in Belarus

The UNHCR Office in Belarus helps refugees to find a home. The UNHCR Office is mandated to cooperate with the Government and to support its efforts in implementing international refugee protection commitments. UNHCR programmes in the country are directed at strengthening the country’s institution of asylum within the context of mixed migration flows, and to find long-term solutions for refugees.

UNHCR will continue to focus its attention on the integration of recognised refugees. Efforts will include: assistance to refugees in finding housing; assistance in finding employment, via vocational training and language tuition; facilitation of the development of social entrepreneurship; and organisation of public information campaigns aimed at building a tolerant attitude to the integration of recognised refugees. The UNHCR Office will also continue to provide legal and social support.

“Since 1997 Belarus has granted refugee status to 817 persons (out of 3,415 applicants); 580 of them have registered in Belarus. Afghans (about 70%), Georgians (23%) and Tajiks (16%) represent the majority of recognised refugees. Most refugees live in Minsk and the Minsk and Homie Oblasts. 67 asylum-seekers arrived in Belarus in 2009, more than in 2008. Last year 15 persons were granted refugee status; two persons acquired additional protection. 103 refugees have been granted Belarusian citizenship since 2005”.



The UNHCR Representative in Belarus Sholeh Safavi with participants of Republican Festival of National Cultures in Hrodna, June 2010

Three new joint projects of the European Union and UNHCR Office in Belarus were launched in 2009. They will be implemented in collaboration with the government authorities, civil society and refugee communities.

The Regional Project “Local integration of refugees in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine” is aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees in these countries. It offers refugees an opportunity to attend free language courses in Russian and their native language, professional and technical training, secondary employment, participation in cultural events and assistance at home.

The Project “Improved efficiency of separating and addressing migration flows at the state border and inside the Republic of Belarus” will contribute to the consolidation and development of the existing system of international protection and monitoring at all major border crossing points with a special emphasis on the “transparent” border with Russia, as well as the system for monitoring the situation of foreigners detained at the Belarusian border.

The “Regional Project for Protection Support” is intended to help refugees, civil society activists, and government officials dealing with migration policy and asylum in addressing resettlement needs.

The primary objective of the project is to ensure decent protection for asylum-seekers and refugees and to provide them with appropriate assistance in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, within the context of the mixed migration flows challenging these countries.

The UNHCR Office in Belarus facilitates the adoption of long-term decisions regarding voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Voluntary repatriation is generally considered the preferred option.

Given that a return to their home country is impossible for most refugees, local integration seems to be the most feasible option in Belarus. Assistance in repatriation is provided on a voluntary basis. Between 1997 and 2008, the UNHCR Office helped almost 200 persons in returning to their countries of origin or resettling in third countries.

# To Put the Rights of the People First

**Interview with Deputy Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Europe Mr. Guillermo Bettocchi.**

**In June Mr. Bettocchi was on a working visit to Belarus.**

**Mr. Bettocchi, you have great experience of working in Asian and African developing countries. Could you compare these regions with Eastern Europe, as far as UNHCR activity is concerned?**

There are certainly big differences in the situation of refugees on different continents. In fact, each refugee situation is different from the others, even on the same continent. But I would suggest the main difference with Africa for example is related to the number of refugees. We in Europe tend to think that Europe is receiving too many refugees, but we have to remember that in African countries we count refugees by the tens of thousands, and the burden that African countries bear is enormous compared to their economic capacities. Kenya, for example, hosts 30.000 Somali refugees, and also a large number of Sudanese refugees. Other countries, like Uganda or Djibouti, which are poor countries, also host large numbers of refugees.

In Eastern Europe and in Europe in general I think there is an important element governments respect the principle that refugees are people in need of international protection and they assume these responsibilities. Most European countries have signed the refugee convention and have undertaken the responsibility to provide protection to refugees. So in that sense, Europe is very important in preserving the institution of asylum. Of course many European countries also contribute to the work of UNHCR in terms of financial support to refugee operations in other, less developed countries.

**During your visit to Belarus you had a number of high-level meetings with Belarusian authorities. What is your assessment of the degree of cooperation between the Belarusian government and UNHCR in protecting the rights of refugees?**

I think the balance is very positive. Belarus has taken a number of legal initiatives that are pretty much in line with international standards and, more specifically, with European standards. Institutional developments within the Government structures also provide a good basis for a sound refugee protection regime.

We are cooperating with the Government of Belarus, for example, on a local integration project for refugees. This is very important as it allows refugees to regain a sense of dignity and normalcy in their lives. We have to bear in mind that refugees have lost everything they had in their countries of origin. They have lost their jobs, their families, their houses. They come to foreign countries not speaking the language and having a different cultural background; it is a very traumatic process. With the cooperation of the Government, and of course with financial assistance from international institutions, I think that we can have a very positive impact on their lives.

Another area in which the Government of Belarus is taking very positive initiatives is in combating statelessness. We hope that the Government will soon be able to announce their decision to sign the international conventions on statelessness. We can already say that the domestic legislation on statelessness meets international standards and that the Government has significantly reduced the number of stateless persons in the country.

So I think that taking these aspects as an indicator of cooperation between our Office and the Government there are very positive signs. And this will be confirmed by the forthcoming visit of the High



**Mr. Guillermo Bettocchi**

Mr. Guillermo Bettocchi is currently Deputy Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Europe, Headquarters in Geneva covering UNHCR's operations in Europe.

Mr. Bettocchi is a lawyer by profession, he studied law at the Catholic University in Lima, Peru and did post graduate studies in the University of Wisconsin in the United States (Master in Legal Institutions program) and the Universidad Complutense, in Madrid, Spain (Doctorate in Human Rights program).

Before joining UNHCR in 1989, Mr. Bettocchi worked as an attorney in private practice and was a law professor in three different Universities in his native Peru. He also participated in several legal drafting committees (Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and Penitentiary Code) and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Lima Bar Association in Lima.

With UNHCR, Mr. Bettocchi has occupied positions in Honduras (Field Officer), Nicaragua (Protection Officer), Guatemala (Deputy Chief of Mission), Geneva (Senior Legal Advisor and later on as Special Advisor to the Director, DIP), Pakistan (Assistant Representative) and, for the previous 4 years, was the UNHCR Representative for Somalia.

Commissioner for Refugees himself, who will visit Belarus at the end of July to sign a country agreement with the Government of Belarus.

**Belarus is the third country you have visited during your recent tour as the new Deputy Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Europe, after Moldova and Ukraine. What are the differences and similarities among these countries in the sphere of refugee protection?**

I think that similarities arise from the fact that all three countries are in a geographic location that makes them transit countries for migration from the East or from the South, towards Western European countries. This is a process that we normally call “complex mixed migration”, because we see people going through these countries for different reasons: for economic reasons, for labour reasons, people who are being smuggled or people who are being trafficked. But among them we also find people who are fleeing their country because of persecution, because of conflicts, because of human rights violations. All three countries share the challenge and the responsibility of being able to identify who is who, and of providing the different human beings that are involved in this process with the treatment that corresponds to their personal situation, whilst respecting their basic rights.

There are a number of regional initiatives, like the local integration project or the protection monitoring project, which can be considered as “good practices” that can be used as examples in other situations. Of course we are at different stages in the process and, because of the size of the country, Ukraine has a much larger number of refugees than Moldova and Belarus, but in general I think there are more similarities than differences, yes.

**How do you see the future of the UNHCR Office in Belarus? Particularly in regard to the forthcoming visit that attaches added importance to UNHCR activities?**

I think this visit will only strengthen the cooperation between our office and the Government of Belarus, and we will continue with the implementation of a number of joint initiatives. We are very encouraged by the fact that the authorities that are dealing with these issues have the right attitude, in the sense that they put the rights of the people first, before thinking in terms of punitive attitudes that, unfortunately, are very common in other countries, especially when dealing with migration or border control mechanisms.

The meetings that I have had in the course of the day have convinced me that the officials dealing with these issues have understood that refugees are human beings fleeing from immense problems and that they need protection and assistance. And I think that this is a very good reason to continue working together.



UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres at the press-conference, Minsk, 29 July 2010

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres arrived in Belarus when the layout of this issue was being prepared. In the course of the July 28–29 visit of the distinguished guest, an Agreement on Cooperation and the Legal Status of the UNHCR Office in Belarus was signed between the Republic of Belarus and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. “Belarus is an important strategic partner for the UNHCR as it is located at the crossroads of the so-called mixed migration flows,” said António Guterres at a press-conference at the National Press Centre on July 29. António Guterres pointed to the persistence of a negative trend—a growing number of refugees. Currently, there are 15 million of them worldwide, and another 27 million people are internally displaced persons. The causes of that are the incessant wars and conflicts.

The High Commissioner highly appreciated a positive stance on the issue of refugee protection in Belarus, manifested both in state policies and in the tolerance displayed by population. According to António Guterres, the example of tolerance displayed by the people of Belarus is extremely important for today’s world.

During his visit, António Guterres met with the President of the Republic of Belarus Aleksander Lukashenko, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Chairman of the State Border Committee, and discussed with them the prospects for future cooperation between the UNHCR and the Republic of Belarus in the field of integration refugees and border management. In the course of his visit, the High Commissioner had an opportunity to discuss the progress made towards resolving the issue of stateless persons.

# Dialogue Between Cultures – the Best Instrument for Peace Building

**On July 3 Belarus celebrates Independence Day. This year the event had a special significance, because the independence and autonomy of cultures, languages and nationalities are the focus of attention of the world community. 2010 has been proclaimed by the UN General Assembly as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.**

In recent years most countries as well as cultural and academic communities worldwide have been increasingly concerned with the negative impact of globalisation on national cultures and language diversity. This has been visible at recent global forums of researchers and cultural and education professionals, notably at the sessions of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) held in Paris.

For the first time many heads of delegations have started to express serious concern on behalf of their governments about the preservation and even survival of their cultures. Many of them stressed that globalisation which, essentially, is driven by financial and economic considerations, is increasingly undermining the economic and political positions of some countries and is trying to place the cultural and educational systems of different countries under uniform standards.

Language diversity has been particularly hard hit. The number of languages used for international communication is decreasing, resulting in the gradual exclusion of many languages from the life of the global community. Thousands of languages used as means of daily self-expression are being excluded from education systems and the mass media. Just one language is starting to dominate worldwide. Preserving the diversity of national languages, the key holders to civilisations, is claimed as an outdated effort.

Research studies by UNESCO suggest that, at the current rate of development of civilisation, more than half of approximately 7000 currently existing national languages are endangered, and may disappear forever. And the disappearance of just one language means an unrecoverable loss for global civilisation.

In light of these concerns, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and designated UNESCO “to play a leading role in the celebration of the International Year” using its extensive 60-year experience of promoting “knowledge sharing and mutual understanding between countries and nations”.

The General Assembly has identified three comprehensive foci for the International Year: dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation. Efforts aimed at the expansion and promotion of dialogue between religions and cultures, tolerance, mutual understanding and cooperation will be undertaken at all levels of society.

On June 4–6, Hrodna hosted the Eighth Republican Festival of National Cultures. This year the festivities brought together creative people representing forty nationalities, as compared to just 11 ethnic communities which participated in the First Festival held in 1996. A fountain in the shape of a grotto was opened at the bank of the Nioman River in honour of friendship between nations. A glass capsule with a message for future descendants, made by craftsmen of the “Nioman” Glass Factory, was bricked up in its foundation. The idea of the Hrodna festival is to bring together under the Belarusian flag representatives of all nations living in the country and to promote appreciation of the traditions of diverse neighbours.

9.5 million people live in the Republic of Belarus. Ethnic Belarusians account for about 80% of the country's population; the remaining 20% are representatives of over 140 nations and nationalities including Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, Tatars, Roma and Sinti, Lithuanians, Azerbaijani, Moldavians, Germans and Georgians. Meanwhile, there are no ethnic, racial, linguistic or confessional clashes or conflicts in Belarus.

The International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures is intended to contribute to the preservation of national identity and independence, cultural and linguistic diversity, tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage. Increased attention will be given to international regulation in the cultural sector and monitoring of the enforcement of decisions and international acts adopted by UNESCO in the form of conventions, declarations and inter-governmental recommendations.



The International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures is particularly important for small countries like Belarus because joint efforts at all governmental levels, aimed at preserving the national culture and supported by borrowings and exchanges between cultures, contribute to the development of the society and the maintenance of its identity.

# ILO Calls for Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016

The World Day Against Child Labour is celebrated by the international community every year on 12 June, under the aegis of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This year ILO is urging that we “accomplish the goal – to end child labour” and eliminate its worst forms by 2016.

The ILO regulations define child labour as work which is harmful and hazardous for a child and is prohibited by international and national legislation. Child labour should be viewed as a very negative phenomenon from the points of view of health, the economy, and society in general. Besides, child labour is an illegal activity which is statutorily banned for this population category (children).

“Today 215 million children have to work in order to survive. They cannot afford the luxury of study and play. The eradication of child labour worldwide has slowed down, and it may be the case that we will not be able to eliminate its worst forms by 2016. We need to restore the previous pace of progress”, said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia.

Within its efforts against child labour, ILO acts as an initiator for the adoption of international labour standards (conventions and recommendations). The First Convention on Child Labour was adopted by the International Labour Organisation in 1919 when ILO was founded. In the course of a few years, ILO adopted a series of other conventions, establishing the minimum age for employment of children in various sectors, including agriculture and fishery. The Minimum Age Convention (1973) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999) have set the most comprehensive ILO standards with regard to child labour. The Republic of Belarus has ratified these Conventions and assumed the respective commitments.

According to the 1973 Convention, the minimum age for employment of children shall not be below the age of finishing compulsory school education and by no means below 15 years. The main goal of the Convention is the ultimate eradication of child labour.

Under the 1999 Convention, the worst forms of child labour include practices such as the use of children in slavery, forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, prostitution, pornography, forced or compulsory recruitment for armed conflict and all forms of work that are likely to harm the safety, health or morals of children. Its provisions are applicable to all children below 18 years of age with no exceptions for countries, sectors or categories of employees.

“Belarus has ratified all ILO Conventions against child labour. The standards established by the Conventions have been incorporated in the country’s legislation,” said Ivan Karchevsky, Head of the Department for the Protection and State Expertise of the Working Environment at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus. “The Belarusian Labour Code regulates various issues related to the employment of adolescents, such as: the age at which it is permitted to conclude a contract; medical screening of persons below 18 years of age; restrictions on employing adolescents in certain job categories; duration of working hours and holiday leave; rates of work and remuneration; guarantees related to employment and attrition.”

The Belarusian Labour Code has established the minimum age for employment - 16 years. However, given written consent of a parent (foster parent, guardian), a contract can be concluded with a person who has attained the age of 14 years to perform simple work which is not harmful for a child and does not affect school attendance.

In some cases the legislation has increased the minimum age for conclusion of a contract. For example, the Labour Code stipulates that a person can be employed in hazardous occupations



Chronology of Conventions on Child Labour (see [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org))



only upon reaching 18 years of age. The list of jobs where the employment of persons below 18 years of age is prohibited includes: work associated with manual lifting of loads in cases where the maximum allowable weight is exceeded; underground work and mining; hazardous occupations.

The Labour Code also prohibits persons below 18 years of age to hold more than one job at any given time, and prohibits the conclusion of written contracts providing for full material liability between an employer and a person below 18 years of age.

Therefore, in terms of labour relations young persons have equal rights with adults, whilst also enjoying special statutory guarantees in terms of labour protection, working hours, holiday leave, remuneration and others.

## Refugees Tell Their Stories at the New UNHCR Website

The new website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home> was launched a year ago. Since then the web-resource has evolved into a vital instrument of UNHCR, an organisation which is mandated to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee-related problems.

The website presents up-to-date coverage of UNHCR activities, press-releases and data on the situation of refugees all over the world. The portal integrates various social networks, thus making it possible to maintain an online dialogue with local communities about issues of global concern.

Meanwhile, because of the difficulty of imagining a situation in which you have never found yourself and understanding the problems of others, the website has a section displaying the personal stories of refugees. Thus, the site presents not only accurate information, but also personal opinions of refugees and experts.

The web-resource offers an easy navigation system: in addition to a key-word search, analysis divided by region is also available. The search options are offered for individual countries and for the five regions: America, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

SEARCH

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**UNHCR condemns forced return of 1,700 Rwandans from Uganda**

UNHCR condemns the forced return of some 1,700 Rwandans from Uganda earlier this week. Two men died after jumping off trucks taking them to Rwanda. [read more](#)

**Photo Gallery:**  
Photojournalist Alexandria Fazzina, winner of this year's Nansen Award, has documented refugee stories around the world.

**Crisis in Kyrgyzstan:**  
Make a donation now, and help to provide shelter and emergency aid to thousands forced from their homes.

**Latest News**

- 75,000 people still displaced in Kyrgyzstan one month on from violence
- UNHCR condemns forced return of 1,700 Rwandans from Uganda
- Education eases the integration of refugees in north-east Brazil
- Teaching safety with angry mobs, bullets and minefields
- Programme seeks to address all aspects of HIV infection in eastern Congo

## Greening the Blue

'Greening the Blue', <http://www.greeningtheblue.org/>, is a new resource showing how to make the UN System more environmentally friendly. The website is intended primarily for the staff of the United Nations, agencies and organisations, so that they may contribute to a reduction in adverse impacts on the environment caused by UN activity.

The website presents data on greenhouse gas emissions generated by each of the 49 UN agencies and gives practical recommendations to the staff on how to reduce emissions.

According to the statement of Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), published on the website, "if climate change is the challenge of our generation, it also presents the opportunity that advances inclusive sustainable development."

The website contains useful recommendations on how the environment can benefit if every individual can adopt even minor behavioural changes. Visitors may download "More Green" posters in A3 format and put them on the wall in their offices.

The website also offers a programme for recruiting "Green Winners" UN staff members who have adopted an environmentally friendly lifestyle and, as far as possible, are teaching their colleagues and friends how to follow suit.

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**GREENING THE BLUE.**

**Greening the Blue**

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# Gala concert devoted to World Refugee Day

Minsk, Belarus

