

History and culture of the united nations high commissioner for refugees (unhcr) ...

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

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1. [Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [Why I Chose UNHCR](#) \n \t
3. [How the UNHCR Sees Itself](#) \n \t
4. [Origins of the UNHCR](#) \n \t
5. [UNHCR for the Past Five Years \(2008-2013\)](#) \n \t
6. [Future Trends of the UNHCR](#) \n \t
7. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
8. [References](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Introduction

Part of my 10-year career plan that commences after my graduation from my Bachelors in International Studies degree program is my intent to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As I have mentioned to myself repeatedly, I wish to contribute to alleviating the ordeal of refugees and migrants by working with them through the UNHCR. Racial prejudice stands as among the many problems refugees and migrants encounter, and I wish to understand that matter better by working with the UNHCR so that I could substantially contribute to removing its harmful effects someday. In light of that, I am presenting a concise yet informative historical and cultural background of the UNHCR, in order for me to present a more compelling reason as to why I want to work with said organization.

Why I Chose UNHCR

My desire to work with refugees and migrants through the establishment of projects based on community-based efforts motivates me to work for the UNHCR. My emphasis on working on the problem of racist prejudice suffered by refugees as they move in a new country characterizes the knowledge I wish to expand in working for the UNHCR, which could enable me to work on programs seeking to eliminate such problem. I believe that removing racist prejudice on refugees could work strongly through the involvement of several communities. Moreover, the UNHCR is perhaps the best-equipped organization for my aspirations on working with refugees, which could give greater meaning for applying my language skills (UNHCR, 2013).

How the UNHCR Sees Itself

Currently, the UNHCR positions itself as the major organization for refugee assistance in the international community, calling its work as the greatest humanitarian operation in history. With its presence in 126 countries, the UNHCR currently has around 8, 000 employees working for it, 1, 000 of which work in its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland (UNHCR, 2013).

Origins of the UNHCR

The UNHCR emerged as a successor organization to the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO). The IRO, formed in 1947, comprehensively covered the concerns of all refugees while the UNRRA, founded earlier in 1944, addressed the problems of people displaced during the Second World War. The formation of the UNHCR came in light of the dissatisfaction of the UN

over the effectiveness of the IRO, starting as a sub-organization of the General Assembly initially intended to exist for only three years starting 1951 (Betts, Loescher & Milner, 2012, pp. 7-103).

Yet, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees made the UNHCR a permanent organization despite qualms coming from some member-nations of the UN since it recognized that refugees do not just exist within Europe. Since then, the UNHCR has become active in mobilizing on war-torn areas such as Vietnam in the 1970s, Yugoslavia in 1999 and Rwanda in 1994, all of which relate to the trends of post-Second World War decolonization and the collapse of the Cold War (Betts, Loescher & Milner, 2012, pp. 7-103).

UNHCR for the Past Five Years (2008-2013)

Currently, most of the activities of the UNHCR center on the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, especially with the events surrounding the War on Terror in Afghanistan and the 2011 Arab Spring (Monsutti, 2008, pp. 58-73). In 2008, the UNHCR acknowledged the return of 273, 000 Afghan refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Although the UNHCR noted the figure as among the lowest rates of returning refugees in its entire Pakistan-Afghanistan operations starting from 2002, it is nevertheless one of the highest rates compared to other refugee return efforts of the organization in other parts of the world (UNHCR, 2008). The rising rate of security and economic problems in Pakistan has driven many Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan, especially with the decline of the Taliban regime. Many Afghans lacked access to job opportunities, basic resources and proper shelters in

Pakistan; hence, their return to Afghanistan pushed through largely due to their hopes of making their lives better (Monsutti, 2008; pp. 58-73; UNHCR, 2008).

In the Global Report 2008 of the UNHCR, the organization reported that it would undertake organizational reforms focused on decentralization and regionalization of processes pertaining to decision-making and creation of a comprehensive review on the system of supply chain management of the UNHCR. Moreover, the UNHCR affirmed in the same review of its commitment towards humanitarian change through further engagement in projects and activities with other agencies and organizations (UNHCR, 2008, p. 18).

In the Dialogue on Protection Challenges held on December 2008, the UNHCR recognized the need of refugees to produce long-term solutions to their problems as stateless people. Following said Dialogue is a Global Plan of Action in 2009, which included the following goals of the UNHCR for refugees: greater support mechanisms for voluntary repatriation, improvement of education programs targeting a 95% enrolment rate before 2013 and strategic, long-term assistance for achieving self-reliance, among many others (UNHCR, 2009, p. 19).

The UNHCR posted further developments of its refugee reform efforts in 2011, when it officially designated Pakistan as the nation hosting the largest population of refugees relative to its economic capacity, followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya. Yet, an alarming 49% of persons of concern consist of women, which emphasizes that the UNHCR has more work to do concerning refugee reform, alongside 46% consisting of children

who mostly applied for asylum unaccompanied by adults (UNHCR, 2011, p. 3). Such has created a concerning prospect for the UNHCR, whose efforts would be met by more problems in the Middle East, particularly with the onset of the 2011 Arab Spring that continues to the present year, 2013, as continued in the following section.

Future Trends of the UNHCR

While the UNHCR recorded a notably successful case in its Pakistan-Afghanistan refugee efforts, it faces another enormous problem in Syria, where thousands of refugees, mostly children, poured over the border of neighboring Iraq. The continuing unrest in Syria over heavy challenges against the legitimacy of President Bashar Al-Assad as influenced by the 2011 Arab Spring has driven many Syrians to escape their war-torn nation to surrounding areas, causing problems to neighbor nations (BBC News Middle East, 2013). The influx of Syrian refugees that crossed the border to Iraq in tens of thousands and mostly consisted of children deemed as an unaccounted majority, happened when chemical attacks in neighboring towns of the capital, Damascus, happened on August 2013. The regime of President Assad, which seemed impenetrable despite the continuity of mass dissent against it, emerged as the one possibly responsible for conducting the chemical attacks, although it denied responsibility (BBC News Middle East, 2013).

The UNHCR stakes its claim on the millions of refugees it has assisted. Yet the ideal assertion stressed by the UNHCR on the right of refugees to seek asylum in any given state (UNHCR, 2013) has found significant challenges

throughout the years, although those come from nations whose concerns lie on the growing number of refugees that they may find hard to manage for the long-term (Betts, Loescher & Milner, 2012, pp. 82-103). Nevertheless, the UNHCR still maintains a well-defined culture of helping refugees in their plight to escape from their home nations due to the abuses of their host governments and other conditions that make staying untenable for them, as in the recent case of the chemical attacks in Syria (BBC News Middle East, 2013). Such enables the UNHCR to maintain its role in the international community as the main humanitarian organization for refugees (UNHCR, 2013).

The requirements of the UNHCR on employing potential members revolve around the necessity of multicultural exposure and constant place assignment locations, as specified by the “talent recruitment initiative” of the organization (UNHCR, 2013). A UNHCR employee must have knowledge on languages involving his intended place of assignment as well as the ability to learn new ones, yet the most basic requirement is that he must speak English very well. He must have relevant work experience amounting to at least two years and a bachelor’s degree for educational attainment, at least. Moreover, he should have the ability to deal with multicultural settings, since he is bound to work with people from various parts of the world, especially in fieldwork. It is also highly important for him to work in conflict zones, since most refugees would come from those places, while maintaining the ability to adjust for switching places of assignment after certain periods (UNHCR, 2013).

Conclusion

It is highly essential for me to become a UNHCR employee in my 10-year plan, given that it is relevant to my academic background and passion to apply what I have learned from my Bachelors in International Studies degree program. In learning more about the UNHCR through studying its history and culture, I have learned that it is highly relevant to my aspiration of becoming a worker for refugees, especially with my emphasis on tackling racist prejudice. Therefore, I truly consider that I stand to have a promising future at UNHCR, given that its history and culture states its nature as one that is compatible with my skills and aspirations to serve refugees.

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