



Mr. Jean Francois Durieux
Director of Division of Programme Support and Management
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

July 28, 2010

Dear Mr. Durieux:

The Inter-agency Working Group (IAWG) on Reproductive Health in Crises commends the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its commitment to serving the reproductive health needs of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. The right to reproductive health for refugees and internally displaced persons was articulated in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development. UNHCR was a founding member of the IAWG community in 1995 and developed the 1997 *Reproductive Health in Refugee Settings: An Inter-agency Field Manual* with other IAWG member agencies. It has since been a leading player in the IAWG steering committee and in efforts to advance the reproductive health of crisis-affected populations.

The IAWG recognizes UNHCR's greater commitment to the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for reproductive health at the onset of an emergency and more comprehensive reproductive health services as the situation stabilizes, as reflected in UNHCR's *Reproductive Health Strategic Plan for 2008-2012*. UNHCR's *Global Strategic Priorities* for 2010-2011 also lists areas of critical concern to UNHCR, including prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence; prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS; and access to primary health care, including reproductive health services.

The provision of family planning services in crises has lagged on a global level in comparison to the other reproductive health components. The 2010 revised *Inter-agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings* further guides service providers to ensure access to contraceptives from the onset of an emergency, and more comprehensive family planning services as the situation permits. Working with implementing and operational partners, UNHCR can scale-up support to family planning in its programmes for women, men and adolescents in refugee settings through:

- Assuring crisis-affected women, men and adolescents are informed of the availability of services and receive adequate information and education on family planning options so that they are able to make their own informed decisions and seek services as necessary.
- Utilizing existing health delivery systems and community mechanisms to capitalize on available systems and build foundations for sustainable programs, including for community-based distribution of contraceptives.
- Enhancing linkages with HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs, for dual protection and family planning options for HIV positive clients.
- Increasing awareness-raising activities for both displaced populations and staff, and training for staff to demystify the issue.

The IAWG counts on UNHCR's wide coverage of refugees and other displaced populations and the potential impact enhancing access to family planning services can have on the lives and well-being of women, men and adolescents in humanitarian settings.

Sincerely,

Inter-agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises