***THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS: REFUGEES AS A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY***

A refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” The idea of subjective human rights, including the right to self-preservation, has been premised on the idea of the moral equality of persons buttressed by a zone of human autonomy that permits the free exercise of rights. Refugees and other forcibly displaced persons have fled violence, persecution and other untenable situations. The overwhelming majority seeks a level of protection and security. However the presence of armed elements in refugee flows and settlements poses a fundamental threat to the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, creating serious security concerns for refugees, host communities, local authorities and humanitarian workers alike.

At 65.3 million, the world’s forcibly displaced population roughly equals in size the number of persons uprooted by World War II and its aftermath (UNHCR 2016; Proudfoot 1956). The world’s spiraling refugee-producing crises reflect the failure of states to prevent stem armed conflict, civil war, terrorism, and breakdowns in the rule of law. Refugee-producing conflicts have regularly erupted or reignited and long-term crises drag on with no solutions in sight. In October 2015, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres spoke of the world’s “shrinking humanitarian space,” resulting from the “interlinked mega-crises in Syria and Iraq” and the displacement within the preceding year of 1.1 million Yemenis, 500,000 South Sudanese, 190,000 Burundians, and tens of thousands of Bangladeshis, stateless ethnic Rohingya, Central America children, and refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (UNHCR 2015d). In August 2016, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 1.6 million South Sudanese were internally displaced and 930,000 had fled to the surrounding nations of Uganda, Sudan, DRC, CAR, Ethiopia, and Kenya, with more arriving daily (UN News Centre 2016). As these situations reveal, if states do not successfully address the causes of refugee flows, they will invariably face the herculean task of responding to their human consequences. The global refugee crisis can also be attributed, in part, to the finely honed strategies of developed states to deny access to protection through border externalization and immigration.

Protracted refugee situations pose additional difficulties, especially when uprooted people lack educational and economic opportunities and where their prospects for durable solutions are limited. This is often the case in host countries where local inhabitants also struggle to survive. Some 90 per cent of the world’s refugees live in developing nations, where economic stagnation and unemployment are high and general opportunities low. The resulting competition, be it real or perceived, for scarce resources leads to friction between refugees and the local population. The latter often blame the former for a variety of problems, including increases in crime. The existence of a link between high crime rates and the presence of refugees is widely accepted, even though the nature of this link is often unclear. In some situations refugees resort to illegal activities as a result of general economic scarcity—or to fill breaks in their food supply. Yet crime rates are influenced not only by refugees but also by changing patterns of conflict across borders. Furthermore, refugees’ attempts to breach restrictions on their freedom of movement, economic activity or self-reliance are sometimes labeled crimes. Host communities sometimes view refugees with suspicion and mistrust. Refugees are perceived as a threat to their hosts’ economic prosperity, social stability and cultural identity. Even where the local population welcomes refugees, their compassion can falter if refugees increase pressure on housing, social services and the environment, or if they stay for longer than anticipated. Such conditions can create fertile ground for the emergence of xenophobia and intolerance.

Furthermore, the situation could be exacerbated by irresponsible news media and manipulation of the refugee issue by self-serving politicians. Over the past several years, conditions have deteriorated in certain countries. There has been an increase in violent attacks on refugees and harsh rhetoric from politicians who use refugees as scapegoats, blaming them for social ills and economic problems. This trend gathered pace following the events of 11 September 2001, especially in the West, where refugees from Muslim countries were vulnerable to xenophobia and discrimination. In the European Union, where there are ongoing efforts to harmonize asylum policies, media reports and public debates quite often blurred the distinction between issues such as asylum, economic migration and terrorism. Security-related fears do not constitute the only barrier to generous refugee policies. Concerns over social cohesion, social order, native employment and economic prospects also underlie anti-refugee sentiment. Large-scale refugee admissions have never enjoyed high levels of public support. Yet in recent years refugee-related terrorism concerns have been particularly tenacious in Nigeria, Europe, Kenya, and elsewhere, contributing to the backlash against refugees and the uneven and parsimonious response to the global refugee crisis. The security threats that host populations and refugees often share, such as rebel activity, ongoing conflict and scarcity may also bring them into direct conflict with each other. Where existing problems are exploited by politicians with intolerant agendas, the result in both rich and poor countries is xenophobia and attacks on refugees.

Some of the security threats outlined above are of long standing. However, in recent years there has been more awareness of the interconnectedness of various threats as well as a more concerted effort to address them. Conceiving of security as a shared concern also means conceiving of it as a shared responsibility. Information channels

One of the most effective strategies in reducing security risks from refugees is the effective dissemination of reliable information. Dependable information is the basis of an effective early warning and assessment system which improves refugee security by ensuring that appropriate assistance measures are put in the right place at the right time. Another strategy is through national legislation. All states that have acceded to the international instruments relating to the protection and assistance of refugees have an obligation to implement national legislation which addressing refugee security is consistent with those instruments. One other way is refugee camps. Camps may be a convenient way to channel and distribute humanitarian aid to large groups of refugees. At the same time, they are unnatural, closed environments which can leave refugees vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation, with the danger increasing where such situations are prolonged furthermore, adequate access to basic services such as water, latrines, distribution points and educational facilities can help enhance security.

In conclusion, the tenacity of the world’s refugee-producing situations, the lack of progress in developing viable and permanent solutions for protracted refugees, and the regular emergence of new refugee-producing situations mean that this crisis will continue to intensify, absent a coordinated and generous global response.