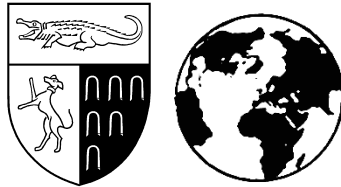


The Yale Journal of International Law Online



RETHINKING THE INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE REGIME

T. Alexander Aleinikoff[†]

I.

How do we tell the refugee story? We—refugee advocates, the press, international organizations—frequently focus on a dramatic personal story, often one of tragedy. We are gripped, punched in the gut, by the picture of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who perished at sea and was photographed face down on a Turkish beach—an image that awakened the Western world to the plight of Syrian refugees. Or we tell a story of triumph, of overcoming hardships that few of us have experienced, to attain remarkable and laudable success—like that of Elizabeth Okello, who grew up in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, the daughter a Ugandan refugee father and a Sudanese refugee mother. She arrived in San Diego as a teenager, became valedictorian of her high school class, and is now studying at Berkeley.

If we do not talk about individuals, we talk about numbers that grow bigger by the year, by the day. The number of displaced persons in the world (both refugees and those internally displaced within their home states) now exceeds 60 million—more than at any time since the World War II. The Syrian crisis has forced 4 million people to neighboring states and another 9 or 10 million have been displaced inside Syria. Lebanon—a country of 4 million—has accepted more than one million Syrian refugees. Translated into US terms, it

[†] T. Alexander Aleinikoff is Visiting Professor of Law at Columbia Law School and Huo Global Policy Initiative Research Fellow at Columbia Global Policy Initiative. He previously served as United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees from 2010 to 2015. What follows is a lightly edited version of the Gruber Distinguished Lecture in Global Justice, delivered on February 8, 2016, at the Yale Law School.

would be as if 80 million refugees had streamed across our borders in the past four years. UNHCR reported recently that the upward trend in flight continued in the first half of 2015, which saw—on average—nearly 5000 new refugees *every day*.

I sometimes try to combine these kinds of stories to try and make the big numbers graspable. In the Syrian situation we talk about the “lost generation” of 2 million Syrian refugee children, less than half of whom are now in school. How many kids is this? Well, if all the school-aged Syrian refugee children were put in school busses and those busses were lined up end to end, the line would stretch from New Haven to 20 miles south of Philadelphia.

I hope that these micro, macro, and combined approaches work. I hope they grab our attention, shake us out of complacency, communicate in a way that vibrates in our viscera the tragic, devastating human harm inflicted on millions of innocent people across the globe. We—refugee advocates and international organizations—tell these stories because want you to care, to give money to relief efforts, to urge your government to adopt more generous resettlement and asylum policies. These are good things and you should do them.

But we know that pictures fade or are replaced: the wrenching image of Aylan Kurdi gives way to the blood on the streets of Paris and the immigration mug shot—shown over and over again—of the San Bernardino killers. And numbers eventually numb. What are a million more displaced people on top of 40 or 50 or 60 million?

So the story I want to tell today is a bit more complicated—a story of system failure and path dependence, of humanitarianism in need of a wake-up call, of the absence of development actors and funders in supporting refugee self-reliance.

After more than 5 years working with the lead UN agency for refugee relief and protection, it has become clear to me that we are treating symptoms, not causes, and we are leaving millions of human beings in long-term care rather than helping them rebuild their lives. The international refugee regime was established to guarantee rescue, rights, and a safe return home; today it provides emergency relief and then produces protracted displacement. A system put in place to end exile now supports and extends exile.

II.

How did we get here?

The 1951 Convention on the status of refugees arose from dire conditions facing millions of displaced persons in post-World War II Europe. They needed status and rights—what is called “international protection” by the refugee community—and ultimately membership in a political community. The Convention established a definition of “refugee” and provided a robust set

of rights to persons recognized as refugees (indeed, we need to see the Convention as one of the major human rights conventions of the post-war era). It further suggested that refugees be offered citizenship in countries of reception—recognizing, as Hannah Arendt had written at the time, that human rights are insecure unless protected within a regime of national citizenship.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees was actually created a year before the Convention was written. The High Commissioner was given the responsibility of *providing protection* and *seeking solutions* for refugees, and states pledged to assist in these endeavors. Three solutions (generally referred to as “durable solutions”) were anticipated by the statute and the Convention: repatriation, integration into the country of asylum, and resettlement to a third country.

The founding legal instruments constructed an implicit bargain among member states: states neighboring a country in crisis would keep their borders open for persons fleeing violence and conflict (providing a “global public good”); and other states would mobilize to provide emergency humanitarian relief and then assist refugees in either going home when the conflict ends or finding a new home in another country. This idea of burden- (or responsibility-) sharing lies at the core of the international refugee regime.

In the early days of the Office and the Convention, Cold War politics made resettlement the favored durable solution. “Defectors” from the Soviet bloc (and Cuba) were welcomed in the West, with little thought that they could or would be repatriated. By the 1960s and 70s, conflicts primarily in Africa created large numbers of refugees, many of whom eventually returned to newly independent states. Return to one’s country of origin came to be seen as the preferred solution, and High Commissioner Ogata declared the 1990s as the “decade of repatriation.”

Despite these returns, the number of refugees around the world continued to rise, reaching nearly 18 million in 1992. In all these various crises, the international community increasingly relied upon UNHCR and its partners to provide more than international legal protection. Budgets and operations were increased to supply life-saving and sustaining relief—food, medical care, education, shelter. An agency created, in effect, as a small group of lawyers in the 1950s had, by the turn of the century, become a massive aid organization providing vital assistance to millions of displaced persons around the globe.

This can all work well if solutions for refugees are in sight. Large-scale relief efforts are sustainable in the short run, and hosting states are willing to provide asylum space to large numbers of refugees if their stay is temporary. But the system breaks down when refugees’ stays, as they have been in recent decades, are no longer temporary. A majority of the world’s refugees now reside in what are called “protracted situations”—defined by UNHCR as a stay of longer than five years for a population of 25,000 or more refugees. There are more than two-dozen protracted situations around the world. Kenya has hosted

hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees for more than 20 years—most of them in camps. About two million Afghan refugees have resided in Pakistan and Iran since the Soviet invasion of 1979. Congolese in Tanzania, and Burmese in Thailand and Bangladesh have suffered similar fates. Quite simply, protracted stay has become the rule, not the exception, for millions of displaced persons.

The Syria crisis will only add to these numbers. Regardless of whether the fighting in Syria ends tomorrow, it is clear that millions of Syrians will not return home in the immediate future.

Now, a system of protracted situations—though short of durable solutions—might be tolerable if refugees were able to rebuild their lives in countries of asylum, but the kind of economic and social inclusion that this would require is generally resisted by hosting states. From these states' perspective, their generous offer of asylum to persons fleeing violence should not be seen as an invitation to integration and permanent residence; at some point, most hosting states assert, refugees should go home. To emphasize the temporary nature of refuge, most hosting states do not permit refugees to work (to be sure, many refugees in fact find ways to earn money, but usually in informal sectors with few or no legal protections) and do not give them access to social benefit programs. Most refugee children have no access to education beyond the primary level. A number of states require refugees to live in camps, where the ability of refugees to become self-sufficient is extremely limited.

The result—as I have labeled it elsewhere—is that refugees suffer a “second exile.” The first exile occurs when they are forced to flee their homes and their country; the second exile occurs when they are excluded from economic opportunities, local services and benefits, and the national social safety net. The Refugee Convention was intended to prevent precisely this. The Convention guarantees, for example, freedom of movement, a right to work and to open businesses, rights to be protected by labor laws and public relief programs, a right to education—a list which equals or surpasses other leading human rights conventions. But enjoyment of these rights is denied in many hosting states, and enforcement—either by legal action or international monitoring—is largely absent.

It is easy, and common, for developed states and international NGOs to point fingers at states of asylum that deny rights and opportunities. But, to my mind, the sorry state of affairs is largely their doing. The vast majority of refugees reside in states bordering on countries in crisis, and most of the hosting states are developing countries. These states, as mentioned, have generally kept their borders open (with the exception of states bordering Syria, who over the past year or so have sharply restricted further entry). They have done so based on norms of regional solidarity, as well as the expectation that developed states would actively participate in the responsibility-sharing called for by the international refugee regime. But that sharing falls woefully short of what a well-functioning system requires. Resettlement numbers remains just a tiny

fraction of the overall number of refugees—fewer than a 100,000 in recent years. Indeed, it is safe to assume that the number of children born into refugee status in hosting states exceeds the total number of refugees resettled in third countries. Non-contiguous states have “burden-shared” primarily by providing funding to international humanitarian organizations and NGOs—very little goes directly to hosting states. To be sure, this pumps tens of millions of dollars into countries of asylum—and, I should add, despite short-term impacts, economic theory predicts that in the middle- to long-run, refugee admissions will be a net benefit for a hosting state. But the direct cost of assisting displaced populations is calculated and announced annually by the UN in its global humanitarian appeal, and that appeal goes underfunded each year by about 50%.

So we see failure in all parts of the system. The international community has proven remarkably ineffective in preventing and ending the conflicts that produce displacement. Countries of asylum routinely deny basic human rights to refugees, with little accountability. Donor states do not do nearly enough to ensure that responsibility for the protection and care of displaced populations is fairly shared across the system. It is thus not surprising that we see millions of refugees essentially living lives in limbo—understandably unwilling to return to states embroiled in violence, unable to participate in the economic and social life of their hosting states (and thus unable to rebuild their lives in any meaningful way), and given far too few opportunities to start life anew in a country of resettlement. Here is the “second exile,” and it is the central problem facing the international refugee regime today.

This is why I find pictures of individuals in flight and of overcrowded boats—troubling and moving images, though they be—somewhat misleading. We can and should condemn the violence that forces persons to flee and the smugglers and traffickers who prey on their desperate search for safety. Turkey must open its borders to the tens of thousands of Syrians who have fled Aleppo just this week. But it is here already that the international community is focusing its efforts. The millions of refugees idle in camps go largely unnoticed, scratching out a living in parched rural settings or living marginal and dangerous lives in cities. Here, sexual violence is rampant, educational opportunities are scarce, and all the trappings of a normal life remain a distant dream.

The pictures of flight are also troubling because they primarily evoke responses to the need for *assistance*—dry clothes, shelter, food. Again, this kind of assistance is often truly life-saving. But what follows? We know what follows: years and years of continued assistance, the denial of opportunities for self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and little progress on durable solutions. All this of course runs counter the ideals and ideas of the Refugee Convention, which provides a charter of rights and a promise of home.

III.

So what needs to change?

Let's be crystal clear about the goal: persons forced to flee from their homes and across international borders need status, rights, and reconnection with an economic, social and political community. That is, the overriding objective of reform initiatives should not simply be more efficient, more effective delivery of humanitarian assistance and bigger budgets all around; rather the goal should be *ending the need* for humanitarian assistance, and doing so by helping and permitting refugees to transition to productive and purposeful lives.

The best route to this goal is by resolute pursuit of durable solutions. I have suggested elsewhere that the international community has a "Responsibility to Solve" situations of long-term displacement, one that flows from the premises of the international refugee system, the purpose of the Refugee Convention, and basic morality.

We have made some progress on this front. UNHCR, in combination with UNDP, the World Bank, a number of donor and hosting states and some NGO partners, have established the "Solutions Alliance," a global collaborative project that seeks to identify protracted situations that might be broken open with specific attention to programming and funding. UNHCR has also developed a Global Initiative on Somali Refugees, which attempts to further solutions for more than one million Somali largely concentrated in Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

The looming challenge, of course, is the Syria emergency—plainly on its way to becoming a protracted situation of enormous magnitude. There will be important international conferences in 2016 that will address the Syria refugee crisis. There are proposals for a "comprehensive plan of action" (CPA), similar to that put in place in 1989 to resolve the situation of the Vietnamese boat people. Under a CPA, the international community could take steps to significantly increase resettlement of Syrians while stepping up assistance to hosting communities in the region. But even if progress is made on the Syrian refugee situation, there will still exist dozens of protracted situations that do not command the attention of the world and remain unresolved because no practical solution is on the horizon.

What should we do if the world does not act on its responsibility to solve, does not unite to produce solutions for the long-term displaced? This is of course the current state of affairs, and the prevailing answer is "more of the same": continued funding of refugee camps, of schools and clinics, of small-bore "income-generation" projects. All of this comes from "humanitarian" accounts in donor states, despite the fact that in most cases the humanitarian crisis ended years ago. Indeed, a majority of the humanitarian funding world-wide goes to situations of long-term displacement. This pattern is known in the

humanitarian community as “care and maintenance,” and the phrase is usually used pejoratively.

We arrived at care and maintenance without much thought. It was simply the outcome of a humanitarian system charged with caring for refugees and a world in which place refugees had no place to go. But it is maintained due to well-engrained bureaucratic practices and a remarkable lack of imagination. I am reminded of a meeting in Nairobi early in my tenure as Deputy High Commissioner when an ambassador from a Nordic country asked me how long UNHCR would continue to operate the Dadaab refugee camp—a camp home to more than 350,000 Somali refugees, many of whom have been there for two decades. I did not have an answer, but then again neither did the Ambassador. There was a mutual shrug of the shoulders as if to say, what options are there? It seemed obvious that none of the traditional “durable solutions” were available: Somalis cannot and do not want to go home, Kenya will not let them leave the camp, and only a few thousand refugees each year attained resettlement elsewhere. So, year after year Dadaab remains the same, now with third-generation refugees.

This is simply not acceptable. We can no longer continue business as usual, laboring under the false assumption that a solution is just around the corner. But change will require a fundamental rethinking of how humanitarians do their work, in at least three respects.

First, there must be a focus on refugee rights. Of central importance are the rights to work and the free movement within countries of asylum—both of which are guaranteed by the Refugee Convention. It may be possible to assert these rights in the courts of some hosting states, and I would urge human rights lawyers to think hard about an international campaign for refugee rights. Where lawsuits are not feasible, refugee rights could be sought as part of a package of increased aid to hosting states. For example, development funding could be directed at infrastructure and industrial projects that would employ both citizens of hosting states and refugees.

Second, the goal of humanitarian programming for refugees must shift from assistance to inclusion of refugees in local services. That is, rather than building separate schools and clinics for refugees, the international community could provide funding for local education and health systems and other social protection programs and then seek to ensure that refugees have access to them. This will undoubtedly be a cheaper alternative and also, importantly, help gain the support of local communities for hosting refugees.

Third, there needs to be dramatic improvement in programs that help refugees achieve self-reliance. Currently the international community spends tens of millions of dollars on so-called “income generation projects,” but there is very little evidence that these programs materially advance refugee self-sufficiency. Nor have micro-credit schemes—once universally touted as the solution to poverty in the developing world—proven effective for refugees. Successful

implementation of new strategies will either require redefining humanitarian work or—probably better—the intervention of development agencies. Traditionally, development agencies have stayed away from displacement, viewing it as falling within the humanitarian basket. But increasingly, these actors—most importantly, the World Bank—have come to recognize that displaced populations can have a significant impact on the development trajectory of hosting states. This suggests a three prong approach: supporting specific livelihoods interventions that can be shown to be effective, building infrastructure to help communities respond to the influx of refugees (i.e., more schools and medical clinics), and providing a foundation for economic growth by bringing electricity, connectivity, and education to regions hosting refugees. Other actors can also play a role. Donor states, through creative financing, may be able to induce private sector investment in hosting communities. For example, the EU will be reducing tariffs on goods produced in Jordan’s newly-established Special Economic Zones, in which both refugees and Jordanian nationals will be able to work.

Taken together, these elements produce very different “business models” for humanitarian and development actors. The overall goal would be to shrink the humanitarian footprint as refugees gain the rights necessary for self-reliance, with development agencies and the private sector providing the means to do so.

Let me give you one example. In 2011, conflict and drought forced several hundred thousand Somalis to flee their homes; about 150,000 Somalis came to southern Ethiopia, to an area known as Dollo Ado, where several refugee camps were established. The first priority of the humanitarian community was to save the lives of thousands of malnourished Somalis, and then to build shelter, start schools and open medical clinics. In Dollo Ado, UNHCR entered into a novel arrangement with the IKEA Foundation, first for emergency relief and subsequently for education. Recognizing the importance of advancing work on refugee self-reliance, IKEA also supported a project under which refugees began to farm unused land near a river that ran year round near the camps. The local community—which nominally owned the land—receives half the proceeds and the remainder goes to the refugees. Progress has been slower than hoped, but the importance of the model is clear, and similar efforts—with public development funding and perhaps private investment—are now being planned for the Turkana region of Kenya and refugee-hosting areas in Uganda.

These kinds of arrangements are in everyone’s interest. It is certainly better for the refugees, who might otherwise live idle lives in camps; it benefits hosting communities, as it sparks development of previously ignored regions; and it appeals to donors, who might be able to see a light at the end of the humanitarian assistance tunnel.

Is it possible to imagine a day—if we do this right—where communities will compete for refugees, knowing that refugees bring labor, skills and access to significant public and private funding for development?

This movement away from care and maintenance in situations where solutions are not on the horizon would represent two important shifts. First, it would mean that humanitarian and development actors would have to plan and implement programs in new ways. Based on my recent experience, I do not underestimate the challenge of fostering change in UN agencies. It will require of course targeted funding and training (retraining) of staff. But it really requires what is hardest in a mature bureaucracy: a change in culture. That change must begin with strong, consistent, and persistent leadership from the top.

Second, the proposed shift in programming has an important conceptual dimension as well. The current paradigm is dichotomous: humanitarian agencies provide assistance (forever) until a durable solution becomes available. Under a new strategy that stresses rights, inclusion, and development, humanitarian work is part of a continuum from emergency relief to solutions; and this work in the middle (post-emergency, pre-solution) should be conceptualized as part of a *progressive realization of solutions*.

There is a model of this that is worth taking note of, even if the follow-up within UNHCR and the broader humanitarian community has not been as robust as I think it should be. I am referring to the outcome of a conference sponsored by UNHCR regarding Somali refugees, and attended at the ministerial level by the major hosting states (Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda) and the source country (Somalia). The conference produced the Addis Ababa Commitment toward Somali Refugees, a document that focuses on all aspects of the protracted situation. For example, states are called upon to

Take all necessary and feasible measures to address, on one hand, the protection problems facing Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, . . . and, on the other hand, their human, social and economic needs and reduce dependency on relief assistance, build self-reliance and resilience through education, vocational training and income-generating activities and facilitate as normal participation in society as possible.

The Commitment addresses xenophobia, asking states to

Combat the negative perceptions taking ground in some cases against Somali refugees by promoting positive messages on peaceful coexistence of refugees and host communities, reinforcing the positive contribution refugees have made to host countries, avoiding the stereotyping of refugees as threats to national security and, at large, fostering congenial relations among peoples.

It sees voluntary return as the preferred solution, requesting states to

Work with and support the Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia to create conditions that will make voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of the Somali refugees both feasible and sustainable

It recognizes the importance of linking humanitarian and development programming, particularly in hosting states.

Perhaps most far reaching, it calls on hosting states to

explore creative, flexible and other initiatives for alternative stay arrangements, particularly for refugees in protracted exile or who have established enduring links with the country of asylum.

This call for comprehensive action includes all the necessary elements of the new approach I am describing. It seeks to “unlock” a protracted situation by focusing on refugee self-reliance, a new role for development actors, recognition of the potential benefits that refugees can bring to a hosting state, additional assistance to hosting communities, and looking for other avenues for refugees to remain in and contribute asylum states. These are all important steps on the road to durable solutions.

We can also come at this the other way, by being more flexible on what a solution might mean. There is a growing literature on “labor mobility as a fourth solution.” If forced migrants can be given a visa or other status that allows them to live and work lawfully in a hosting state (perhaps also travelling between their country of origin and hosting state) then it might be possible to withdraw international protection and assistance. This strategy could be accomplished at the domestic level or regionally, so thought is being given to how participation in regional organizations like ECOWAS (Western Africa) or MERCOSUR (South America) that create common markets and guarantee free movement of labor and permission to work within any member country could provide a durable solution for refugees.

In sum, I have suggested that restoring dignified lives to refugees requires all actors—hosting states, international organizations, donor states, humanitarian and development actors—to reject “care and maintenance” as an acceptable strategy and to focus robust efforts on solutions and measures that move us towards solutions.

IV.

So far I have focused on how traditional actors—states, multilateral organizations—can do their work differently to fix a system that they have permitted to fall into disrepair, with tragic consequences for millions of people. But I am wondering if in fact we are beginning to move to a new place

altogether, if we are at an inflection point in the international refugee system that marks a move away from a state-dominated regime pursuing largely state-based interests.

Let me explain. There are two intertwined threads that run through the design and history of the refugee regime. The first is a human rights thread—promoting life, liberty and important individual rights for persons forced to flee across borders. The second is a state-interest thread—from this perspective, refugees are an anomaly in a system of states that seeks to keep things orderly by assigning persons to states by way of the institution of citizenship. Under this second view, refugee flows are perturbations that need to be controlled and regularized.

Both approaches leave states in the driver's seat—determining questions of rights and solutions. And the two threads are not necessarily in conflict. Indeed the concept of a durable solution fits neatly with both: (re)attaining full membership in a polity is both an effective route to securing and protecting rights, and it solves the problem of “free-floating,” stateless individuals.

It is unfortunate that today the state-interest thread has taken on a somber hue—asserting *control* as the primary goal rather than regularization of status. We see this in efforts to deny access (as in Hungary, Lebanon and Jordan), to deflect flows (Australia and Denmark), and detain those who reach or cross the border (United States, Israel). Of course, these control strategies put extreme pressure on the individual rights account.

What is noteworthy, I would submit, is that today we are witnessing civil society and refugees themselves putting significant pressure on the state-based premise of international refugee regime—by challenging policies of containment and control and with the assistance of modern technology.

The Syria situation demonstrates this in bold relief. The so-called asylum crisis in the EU began when tens of thousands of refugees who could no longer tolerate uncertain (and frequently miserable) conditions of life in countries of first asylum began to board boats and walk across land routes toward Europe. They didn't wait for resettlement opportunities or new programs of humanitarian admissions; they opted instead for “self-resettlement.” Crucial for their travel and reception in Europe are technological innovations that are helping to undercut state domination of the refugee regime. Facebook, GPS instruments, and mobile technology coordinated their movement and amplified civil society participation. Caravans of cars from Austria, organized via social media, picked up refugees in Hungary. Airbnb for refugees went on-line in Germany. Refugees on boats texted family members about where and when they would reach landfall.

How far all this will go is uncertain. It is possible that higher walls will be built, and that Angela Merkel will be forced from office, with populist parties winning the day against “the barbarians at the gate.” Or perhaps the flow to

Europe—continuing today (65,000 more refugees arrived in Europe in January)—is the harbinger of a transnational refugee regime not fully controlled by states, under which the empowerment of refugees and the civil society that helps them will continue to grow, fueled by technology without borders. Already, platforms are being built that aim to match refugees with particular skills with employers in other countries. I can imagine a financial institution offering every refugee in the world a bank account and bank card. Doctors and teachers are now reaching refugees through web-based technologies. Might we see a Refugee Nation forming? The creation of a pan–forced migrant virtual identity?

I think it is likely that the regime will end up somewhere between fully state-based and Refugee Nation, displaying an enhanced role for civil society and the private sector. This might work itself out as fostering public-private partnerships, with the “private” side participating more as an equal than as a mere “implementing partner” of state-based programs. Let me suggest two significant innovations along these lines that could and should be pursued. First, the private sector could play a leading role in job and infrastructure development in refugee hosting areas—a function normally left to public actors because of the difficulty of navigating local politics and the uncertainty of levels of return on investment. Provided that the protection principles are not compromised, private investment would help demonstrate the economic potential that refugees can bring to hosting communities; and donor states could incentivize these investments by helping to absorb or spread the risk, such as in Jordan’s Special Economic Zones.

Second, the United States and other governments should seriously consider permitting privately-sponsored resettlement of refugees. Canada has had these kind of arrangements for more than three decades and has welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees beyond the number sponsored with state funds. One of the questions I am most frequently asked is how citizens can assist in refugee relief efforts. I think a program of private sponsorships would receive widespread public support in the US, perhaps doubling—as it has in Canada—the number of refugees resettled here each year. It would be a powerful and tangible response to the hateful and shameful proposals now being made that would keep all Muslim refugees out of the resettlement process.

V.

This will be the year of international conferences on refugees. Syria will be the main focus. Just last week, donor states gathered in London and pledged \$10 billion in additional assistance to the region. At the end of March, UNHCR will sponsor a conference aimed at increasing resettlement. In May, the Secretary General’s World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul will address new strategies to prevent and end displacement. In September, both the UN and the US have announced summits for world leaders to consider a global compact on responsibility-Sharing for large-scale refugee flows.

Will these many efforts generate commitments to new models for ameliorating the plight of millions of persons who have been forced to flee their homes? Or will they merely produce a few more resettlement slots for the lucky few, a few more dollars to increase assistance? As should be clear by now, I think some radical surgery on the system is needed, and I have made some suggestions on ways forward.

But I wonder whether this has been a bit too measured, too dispassionate, a policy talk as policy talks go. Nilufer Demir, a photographer for Turkey's Dogan News Agency, who took the picture of Aylan Kurdi that the world came to see, was asked about his experience on the beach. "There was nothing to do except tak[e] his photograph," he said "There was nothing to do. And that is exactly what I did. I thought this is the only way I can express the scream of his silent body."

I find myself, now leaving UNHCR, wanting to echo that scream. So I wrench , unforgivably, Alan Ginsburg's poem *Howl* from its context and moorings and rewriting it for these purposes:

I have seen thousands of people destroyed by violence,
millions pushed from their homes, dragging themselves across
deserts and oceans, villages bombed and burning, who
grabbed their children
Who paid smugglers and traffickers but were left on sinking
boats with engines cut and no life jackets

And here I can use, with ellipsis, Ginsburg's actual words:

who cowered in unshaven rooms . . . listening to the Terror
through the wall . . .
who vanished into nowhere . . . who wandered around and
around at midnight wondering where to go, and went.

As I look back on more than five years at UNHCR, I am in a youth center in Kampala, Uganda, where refugee children from several nations sing songs of their exile and describe to me their bleak lives on the street. I am with Burmese refugees on the Thai border in a camp located in a lush forest. The opportunities for agriculture abound but now more than 2 decades after creation of the camp, humanitarian agencies still truck in food assistance. In Tanzania, I am shown a class where an international NGO trains young men to be electricians despite the fact that there are no jobs available to them once they complete the course. I talk with refugee women in Kenya who used to earn their living as "cutters" but who now campaign to try to end the nearly universal practice of female genital mutilation in the Dabaab refugee camp.

I leave my UNHCR cap on a hook in a concrete hovel that houses a dozen boys in a camp in northern Ethiopia, home to more than *a thousand* unaccompanied

minors who have fled Eritrea. With other UNHCR staff, I am locked into a compound at night in Bossasso, Somalia. I leave the next day but the staff will remain for two years or more. In the oppressive heat of a camp in South Sudan, in a squatter settlement above Medellin, Colombia, in a flooded Afghan refugee settlement near Peshawar, Pakistan, I see children who want to go to school, men and women who want to work, human beings who want the opportunity to rebuild their lives. In a refugee camp in the lunar landscape of Djibouti, a young girl holds up a sign as my all-terrain-vehicle drives by that says “We need durable solutions.”

There is no single refugee story; it cannot be summed up in one tragic picture of an innocent boy on a rocky beach. There are instead tens of millions of narratives, produced by the depravity of leaders who pursue conflicts irrespective of the harms visited upon their citizens and by the failure of the international community to end those conflicts, by gross violations of human rights, by exile without end.

It is a time not for pity but for outrage; not for hand-wringing but for rolling up one’s sleeves and getting to work.