

UNHCR: Putting refugees on the map

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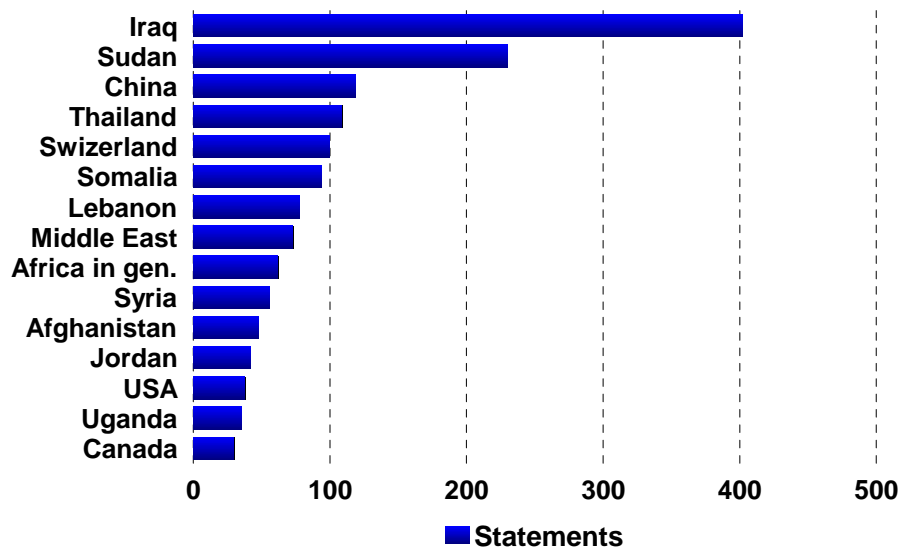
Although there are more than 40 million people on the run worldwide, their plight becomes a media issue only, when certain conditions are met, making flight and displacement a news issues. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whose organisation is supporting almost 33 million refugees worldwide (www.unhcr.org/statistics.html), needs to leverage media coverage in order to mobilise public support for refugees worldwide – and not only in the hot spots of the world that are our TV screens every evening.

Classic news values - like conflict, personalisation or potential damage – might increase media awareness, but are they compatible with the supranational character of the United Nations? Should the media department of the UNHCR focus on the most pressing areas or should it show the whole scope of flight and displacement worldwide? How can the UNHCR show successful developments without relativizing the struggles of the refugees? Is there a role for celebrities in the media image of the UNHCR or do their appearances only breed cynicism on the side of the journalists?

Chart 1 shows the focus on refugees in Iraq, UNCR stressed in its communications in the first half of 2007. Sudan/Darfur on the other hand received notably less reporting.

Chart 1:

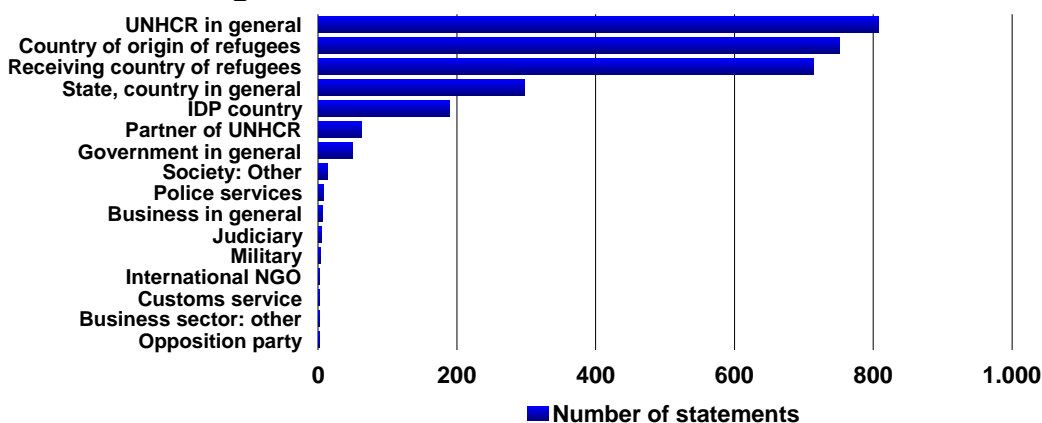
Surfing the media agenda: Regional structure of reports about the UNHCR in global media 04-07/2007



Basis: 2.922 Statements about the UNHCR in 81 global media

Chart 2 shows the structure of reports about the UNHCR. Less than 1/3 focused on the activities of the organisation, while more than 72% displayed the messages of the UNHCR about the situation of refugees, the causes and the effects of flight and displacement. While these quotes from UNHCR representatives were naturally rather neutral, reporting about the activities was somewhat more polarized, as the media among other issues reported about reprisals against UNHCR operatives.

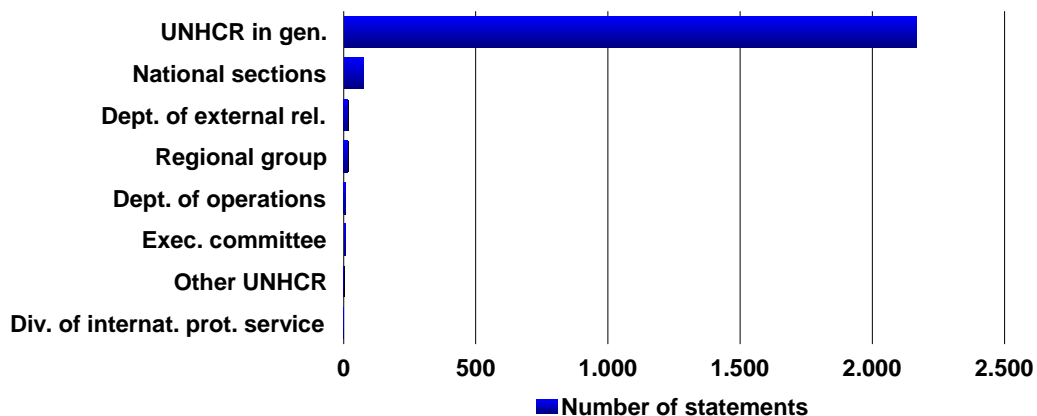
Chart 2:
Activities and messages: Perspective of reporting about the UNHCR in global media 04-07/2007



Basis: 2.922 Statements about the UNHCR in 81 global media

Chart 3 shows how the organisation at large dominates the media image of the UNHCR, while its national sections and departments only play a minor role. Colourful news stories from these units might boost the media presence of the whole organisation by focusing on the people on the ground, their work and their achievements.

Chart 3:
Monolithical structure: Units and divisions addressed in reports about the UNHCR in global media 04-07/2007



Basis: 2.922 Statements about the UNHCR in 81 global media