- Some three years ago, UNHCR established a 'security package' in refugee populated districts in western Tanzania under which UNHCR met the cost of posting police officers in and around refugee sites and provided these officers with special allowances, equipment, vehicles, fuel and accommodation

- This year, UNHCR transferred refugees away from the Guinean border to newly created camps inside the country and is planning to assist the Guinean Police and Gendarmerie with a similar 'security package' as applied in Tanzania

These examples show our commitment in addressing refugee security issues whenever we are in a position to do so. We have recognised for some time, however, that it is necessary for all those involved in refugee protection to address this issue in a more systematic and effective manner.

Emergency preparedness and response

UNHCR has learnt through previous experience that refugee security is extremely difficult to restore once it has been compromised and that preventive action, be it for the security of refugees or for our own staff, is crucial. Preventive action requires pro-active rather than re-active security management: you have to be prepared so that you can deploy rapidly and establish an early presence in refugee hosting areas. To be 'prepared', as you undoubtedly know, is not an easy task. There are resource constraints and UNHCR, as any other humanitarian organisation needs to balance the need for an 'emergency capacity' with funding realities that often relate more to the present than to the future. One way of achieving a minimum level of preparedness is through stand-by arrangements with donor governments.

The "ladder of options"

In order to achieve stronger managerial control, UNHCR has fused the emergency preparedness and response unit and the security unit in one combined service: the Emergency and Security Service. Within that service, emergency and security staff is trying to operationalise the 'ladder of options'.

The ladder of options is a concept that was first introduced by the High Commissioner in 1997 in an attempt to determine action in the increasingly hostile humanitarian environment, which I have just described.

The concept involves different types of measures (ranging from soft, to medium to hard), so that the international community can deal in a more systematic and effective manner with insecurity in refugee and returnee populated areas. It equally describes a series of possible responses to escalating threats to the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and to the security of refugees and humanitarian personnel.

It should be stressed that the problem of security, as such, should be an issue for which a multiplicity of actors share responsibility: refugees themselves, local populations, countries of origin, host countries, donor states, regional organisations, UNHCR and its operational partners, as well as the political and military components of the United Nations System.

Options under the ladder include: