

**Key note address by Mr. Anne-Willem Bijleveld, UNHCR Director of the Bureau for Europe
Seminar on “The role of the military in refugee camp security – policy and practice”
10-12 July, Eynsham Hall, England**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNHCR is grateful to the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada for having convened this important and timely meeting and I am pleased and honoured for the opportunity to address this distinguished audience on the role of the military in refugee camp security. A similar workshop organised in March 2000, in Ottawa by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade on the possible role of international police in refugee camp security was instrumental in the development of UNHCR policies in this regard and I certainly hope that this meeting will prove to be of equal importance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to introduce to you the issue of a changing humanitarian operational environment. UNHCR’s core mandate has not changed since 1950. The protection of refugees and the search for solutions to their problems have remained our central objectives. But the environment in which we work has changed significantly –particularly in the past decade. During the latter part of the 20th Century UN Agencies, Non Governmental Organisations, and other humanitarian actors relied on an often tacit and unspoken agreement between all groups involved in a conflict to respect their neutrality. Humanitarian actors would be “impartial” in the delivery of assistance and, were therefore perceived as “neutral”. Parties would respect and consent to humanitarian action.

Ironically, this situation began to unravel just at the time the world began to look forward to what later proved to be a false dawn of hope. With the end of the Cold War, some statesmen predicted an era of sustained peace and economic prosperity. Instead, a series of long simmering ethnic, religious and other conflicts erupted, often within States rather than between States. Many of these were characterised by intense violence committed by regular armies, militias, warlords, guerrilla and bandit groups in which civilian populations were deliberately targeted, particularly in wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Great Lakes region of Africa, Sierra Leone, Timor and Kosovo. Moreover, as a result of these conflicts, we have seen a growing number of persons becoming internally displaced. The refugee outflows have also become more complex with mixed groups, including armed elements crossing borders.

Forced displacement of the “opposing group” has very often become a major objective, rather than a consequence, of these conflicts. Displacement has also grown in scale. The number of people of concern to UNHCR today is 22 million, up from 15 million in 1990 and 5 million in 1980. It has also changed in scope, with virtually no region –Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America –unaffected. Refugees and humanitarian workers often became deliberate targets for one side or another rather than occasional, accidental victims.