

**End of Mission Report (PROCAP)**  
**Ivana Vuco – SPO, UNHCR – Libya operation, south Tunisia**  
**(14 Jun – 16 Jul 2011)**

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**Overview of Assignment**

1. I was seconded to the UNHCR Libya operation on 14 June, 2011, upon my evacuation from Yemen. My assignment was completed on 16 July 2011, when I handed over the coordination of the West Libya Protection Cluster to another ProCap Senior Protection Officer.
  2. UNHCR Libya is based in two locations: Benghazi in east Libya and Zarzis, Tunisia. I was deployed to the Zarzis office as Protection Cluster West Libya Focal Point with the following Terms of Reference (TOR):
    - Under the guidance of the overall Protection Cluster Coordinator/UNHCR Libya Team Leader, serve as UNHCR Protection Cluster Lead for West Libya. Coordinate the response and strategic direction in close consultation with the overall cluster coordinator;
    - Facilitate meetings, set agendas and finalize minutes;
    - Ensure individual cluster member concerns and issues are raised systematically and at appropriate level, ensure the feedback of the cluster for western Libya feeds into the overall strategic focus, priorities of the Libya protection cluster;
    - Perform other protection functions on behalf of UNHCR Libya, including building staff capacity, undertaking missions to Libya and helping to develop protection systems;
    - Perform other tasks as required.
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**Operational Context**

3. UNHCR Libya maintained two offices, one in Benghazi, east Libya, and another in Zarzis, Tunisia. The office in Benghazi was responsible for the areas under the control of the opposition or rebel forces east of Ajdabiya, while the western portions of the country to the Tunisian border were under the office based in Zarzis. Both offices were managed by the UNHCR's Libya Emergency Team Leader, who also held the title of the Libya Protection Cluster Coordinator.
4. In response to a large number of fleeing Libyan civilians and third-country nationals (TCNs), in March, UNHCR established the UNHCR South Tunisia office with an extensive operation of assistance for some 70,000 Libyan refugees and TCNs who had fled the conflict in Libya and sought shelter either in refugee camps or amongst host community in areas close to the Libyan border. UNHCR South Tunisia office was also based in Zarzis. The South Tunisia office operated a significantly larger program than UNHCR Libya. It recorded that some 880,000 people have crossed the border from Libya to Tunisia since February 20, of whom, 203,554 were TCNs, 604,673 Libyans and 81,006 Tunisians. Libyan and Tunisian nationals were estimated to represent 76 percent of the total number of all displaced to Tunisia. It was also estimated that 77 percent of the Libyans who crossed into Tunisia returned to Libya in July and August.
5. At the time of my deployment, UNHCR South Tunisia office directly managed two camps: the southern Tunisian Remada camp for Libyan refugees predominately from the Nafusa Mountains ("Jabbal Nafusa"), and the Tunisian Choucha camp for TCNs. From mid-June to mid-July, two UNHCR camps and three other camps in Tunisia, operated separately by the Red Crescent Societies of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the State of Qatar, accommodated roughly 6,000 to 7,000 people. Over 70 percent of the Libyan refugees were civilian population, mostly elderly, women, boys and girls. The two UNHCR offices, UNHCR South Tunisia and UNHCR Libya, for reasons of their distinct geographic mandates, maintained separate operations with separate reporting lines.

6. The conflict in Libya was concentrated around several cities in the north of the country. Particularly affected were the government-controlled cities of Ajdabiya and Brega situated to the east of Tripoli and Gharyan in Jabbal Nafusa, south of Tripoli, from where the opposition evidently sought to access Tripoli. Heavy fighting also took place in and around the border towns of Wazin and Nalut, controlled by the opposition, through which daily supplies were brought to Jabbal Nafusa's opposition forces.
7. In conclusion, the country was effectively divided between the opposition-held territories and those controlled by the government with the seat in the capital Tripoli. The opposition firmly controlled almost the entire eastern half of the country with Ajdabiya as its westernmost point, and in the west, some 100 kilometres of Western Mountains or Jabbal Nafusa, surrounded to the north and south by the forces loyal to the Tripoli-based government. In Benghazi, the opposition has formed the Transitional National Council (TNC) as interim authority for all opposition-held territories. In the western Jabbal Nafusa, TNC operated through civil and military councils.
8. NATO entered the conflict in Libya on March 27 under UNSC Resolution 1973 for initial period of 90 days. Its mandate was subsequently extended by NATO member states in June. NATO operations took place exclusively in the areas controlled by Ghaddafi forces, mostly in and around Tripoli where a number of interventions were made against military targets, including weapons caches.

#### **Protection agencies present and their response**

9. Most agencies with operations in Libya maintained their base in the Tunisian town of Zarzis, which also served as a more permanent base for the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Amongst Zarzis-based agencies were OCHA, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, and UN-affiliated IOM. UNMAS (UN Mine Action Service), and MAG (Mine Action Group) began to deploy to Zarzis in mid-July. Almost all mentioned UN agencies, with the addition of IOM, at various times attended protection cluster meetings, both in Zarzis and Benghazi. Some international NGOs (INGOs) only operated in the east, but most of them retained, for reasons of coordination, at least some staff in Zarzis. Zarzis based NGOs were medical NGOs, such as International Medical Corps (IMC), Medicine Sans Frontier (MSF), Merlin, as well as the International Relief and Development (IRD), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (Adra) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). A large number of expatriate Libyan organizations operated from the south Tunisian town of Tataouine and Zarzis (as well as from Benghazi), but they remain outside the UN and INGO humanitarian coordination mechanism. Most of the aid was delivered through the Libyan diaspora groups, in many cases set up solely to support TNC and the regime change.
10. In the West, the operational agencies were mostly international medical NGOs with regular access to opposition-controlled Nafusa Mountain. IMC, MSF and Merlin, with addition of the opposition-set up Libyan Red Crescent had their medical staff based in Nafusa towns' health clinics. Others, such as Adra, DRC and IRD, carried out irregular missions to Nafusa, for the purpose of conducting assessments, delivery of non-food items (NFIs), etc. UNHCR and WFP worked through the Libyan Red Crescent and/or Tunisian partners to deliver food and NFIs.
11. In the month I was deployed as West Libya Protection Cluster Focal Point, humanitarian access remained limited to the Nafusa mountains. UN carried out one inter-agency mission to Nafusa and two missions, of which one extended to nine days, to Tripoli. The mission preparations were rather extensive, due to restrictive security environment and regulations. INGOs had, for most part, no access to Tripoli.

#### **Protection coordination structures in place**

12. The Protection Cluster in Libya was set up in April and May. Intended as one unified cluster for Libya, it effectively functioned through its two branches, one in Benghazi for east Libya and another in Zarzis for west Libya. Protection Cluster in both locations met on a weekly basis. The Cluster chair was UNHCR, and each branch had a dedicated UNHCR Focal Point and a Deputy Focal Point: in Benghazi this was the Libyan Committee for Humanitarian Relief (LCHR), an humanitarian arm of TNC, and in Zarzis, the Danish Refugee

Council (DRC). The overall UNHCR Libya Team Leader performed the functions of Protection Cluster Coordinator and split his time equally between Benghazi and Zarzis.

13. The two cluster branches functioned differently in many aspects. The eastern Benghazi branch was largely operational, integrating the coordination of NFIs and shelter assistance into its many responsibilities, while the western Zarzis-based branch functioned primarily as an information gathering and sharing forum. The Western branch was a closed-group forum where sensitive issues such as rape, military conduct of all parties to the conflict, detention, treatment of third-country nationals (TCNs), GBV, and the recruitment of children were openly discussed, and members tasked to monitor any significant developments in that regard. This was apparently different in Benghazi, where the cluster, due to its operational character and closer association with the opposition refrained from engaging in protection/human rights monitoring.
14. UNHCR South Tunisia, running a refugee and TCN program in Tunisia held its own information sharing and coordination structure, often identical in nature to the Zarzis-based coordination structure set up for Libya. As most actors, other than UNHCR, did not have distinct offices for Libyan POCs in Tunisia and Libya, they were often required to sit in Tunisia-specific coordination meetings as well as Libya-specific coordination meetings. The discussions, insofar as it concerned information on the situation in Libya, were frequently repetitive, not least because the major sources of information for both groups were the same: Libyan refugees, TCNs and the diaspora groups.

### **Protection Context**

15. In terms of information gathering and protection monitoring, Libya proved a challenging environment. Undertaken assessments clearly pointed to the need for food, water and medicine, as well as qualified medical professionals. Protection needs inside Libya were much more difficult to assess. In mid-June, most of the civilian population from Jabbal Nafusa fled to Tunisia, where the assistance was provided by multiple sources, including UNHCR South Tunisia office. About 100,000 or so people displaced inside Libya were either inaccessible or assisted by TNC town councils or the government, depending on their location. Issues such as GBV, free movement of migrants and TCNs, recruitment of children and aid distribution were systematically raised in the Protection Cluster but proved difficult to investigate. The information frequently turned out to be contradictory or simply inadequate. Some of the issues that raised much media attention, such as rape committed by government in the course of military campaigns appeared difficult to investigate. When such violations were alleged to have taken place in and around Jabbal Nafusa, any further probing gave very little concrete results. While this is no reason to conclude that such violations were not committed in Libya or even western Libya, the more detailed probing often found that much of what was alleged was based on rumors. The rumors of rape, in particular, appeared to have informed at least some of the decisions of the civilian population to abandon their places of residence and seek shelter in neighbouring countries.

### **The role of UNHCR and relationship with other agencies**

16. In June, the west Libya office in Zarzis had five staff, including the Coordinator, three protection staff and the program officer. With the exception of NFI assistance provided to Jabbal Nafusa and the Tripoli area, it was primarily concerned with information gathering and protection coordination. For information, the office was highly dependant the UNHCR South Tunisia Office and INGOs with medical activities in Nafusa. In mid-June at least, the information sharing between the two UNHCR offices, UNHCR West Libya and UNHCR South Tunisia, appeared insufficiently systematic. This began to change soon after the arrival of additional UNHCR staff (mostly from UNHCR's Yemen operation), expansion of monitoring activities by UNHCR South Tunisia and the setting up of more systematic information sharing system. The same applied for a relationship between OCHA and UNHCR South Tunisia.

### **The West Libya Protection Cluster key objectives: Achievements**

- From mid-June to mid-July, the Cluster produced several documents, amongst which was an information chart outlining all the information gathered by cluster members in west Libya with most information being available on the Nafusa mountains. The chart, supplemented by information gathered by OCHA, was intended to organize the members' weekly briefings and focus the discussion on protection related issues.

- In July, the Cluster proposed two protection monitoring forms, (i) a situational check-list of protection issues to be used as guidelines in the field by operational agencies, primarily INGOs in the Nafusa Mountains; and (ii) a generic incident form to help record whatever specific incidents were to be encountered in the field.
- By the end of June, protection officers from UNHCR South Tunisia office and UNHCR Libya attended each other protection coordination meetings and exchanged information in formal and informal settings, which helped improve the overall understanding of the situation and opened the door for shared programming.

### **SPO Achievements and Challenges**

17. My deployment with UNHCR Libya was brief, and mainly guided by the need to provide for a more senior management of the West Libya Protection Cluster in a manner that sought to energize the membership and helped the cluster members identify the objectives they wished to achieve in an immediate term. The effectiveness of the clusters everywhere depends on their members' dedication and willingness to invest time and energy into their clusters' work. This is even more case with the Protection Cluster where deliverables are often fewer and insufficiently quantifiable, as was the case in west Libya. The idea of protection monitoring and information sharing, for example, must be paired with some concrete decisions and results to be achieved within the time perceived as reasonable by the cluster members. The cluster members are also employees of their organizations defined by their distinct mandates, expertise and interests. The cluster is thus only effective if it is defined by consensus and interests commonly shared by its members. In four week of my deployment as West Libya Protection Cluster Focal Point, I sought to build the relationships amongst the members and between the members and UNHCR as a way of forming a consensus-based decision-making group.
18. The Libya operation is characterized by the one to three-months' deployments of staff from other emergency operations in almost all organizations, including INGOs. The consistency and institutional knowledge was thus often compromised. Coordination meetings frequently sought new members joining in and dropping after some months or sometimes weeks. This naturally affected the work of the Protection Cluster, especially in those cases where there was inadequate handover between the staff or the organizations were slow to recruit the departed staff members' replacement.

### **Final Conclusions and Key Recommendations**

19. One of the interesting lessons from the Libya experience concerned coordination. While indisputably needed, the coordination in Libya appeared to be at times overly structured, especially in view of the fact that there was only a handful of humanitarian actors operational in Libya with limited number of staff available to attend multiple meetings. There were many other actors with interest in eventual program development in Libya but without immediate capacity to do so, and consequently, without effective contribution to the coordination meetings. Between UNHCR South Tunisia coordination meetings and those concerning Libya which in many ways replicated the global cluster system<sup>1</sup>, operational agencies frequently complained of repetition and lack of flexibility on the part of coordinating agencies. Setting up meetings on a weekly basis may be helpful for individual members' time planning, but may, in terms of achievements and overall effectiveness, in some cases be less effective than if substituted by the system that is more in tune with needs by the organizations on the ground and the amount of issues or activities that require coordination.
20. The peculiar situation of Libya required humanitarian agencies to work from Tunisia with, at least in the case of the UN, limited and sporadic access to Libya itself. This effectively meant that most agencies, including those seeking information on the situation in Libya, needed regular access to and information from refugees inside Tunisia. In discharging of its core mandate, UNHCR South Tunisia maintained a substantial program supporting Libyan refugees and TCNs in Tunisia, including their registration, protection monitoring and coordination of assistance. In the process, significant information was collected on their current situation as well as the situation in the areas of displacement. The information was not always adequately shared, especially in view of the fact that UNHCR South Tunisia was not a member of the Libya coordination mechanism. Separation of mandates per countries (and strict reinforcement of the decision that refugees, constituting UNCR's core mandate, are not to be 'clasterized') led, at times, to strained relations between Libyan and Tunisian

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<sup>1</sup> Even though some clusters seem inactive most of the time.

organizations. The subsequent efforts to systematize the information sharing by OCHA and both, UNHCR South Tunisia and UNHCR Libya, helped smooth the differences and establish effective working relations.

21. Finally, it is important to ensure that cluster coordinators have requisite skills in coordination as well as an expansive understanding of protection as a concept that is inclusive of other agencies' mandates, and not just that of a lead agency. To explain: coordination is as much about negotiation and consensus-building as it is about decision-making and, thus, beyond simple negotiation skills, certain seniority of coordinators in the lead agency's ranking system appears to be necessary. In other words, the Cluster coordinator is frequently that one person with the ability to shape the Cluster's work and give it a necessary direction. For example, the cluster can perform multiple useful functions for its members, such as fundraising, joint programming and assessments, training where necessary, etc. The members, on the other hand, are expected to, in addition to attending coordination meetings of which Protection Cluster is a part, perform their regular duties as protection or program officers in their organizations and thus have little time to engage in joint Cluster planning or fund-raising. These responsibilities thus fall squarely on the shoulder of the Coordinator. In the absence of requisite skills or knowledge of coordination resources and available helpful tools by the Coordinator, the cluster may risk becoming a briefing-only forum and thus fail to achieve its full potential.