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U.N. Reports Steady Rise of Refugees

By CAROLINE BROTHERS

PARIS — The United Nations refugee agency said Monday that as of last year, 43.7 million people around the globe had been forcibly displaced from their homes by conflict or persecution, the highest number in 15 years. Eighty percent of refugees were being sheltered in the world's poorest countries, and the agency warned that they could not continue to shoulder the burden alone.

The agency's 2010 Global Trends report said that Pakistan, Iran and Syria were the world's biggest hosts of refugees, sheltering three million people among them, 1.9 million in Pakistan alone. The industrialized country with the largest refugee population was Germany, hosting 594,000 people.

"Fears about supposed floods of refugees in industrialized countries are being vastly overblown or mistakenly conflated with issues of migration," António Guterres, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, said in a statement. "It's poorer countries that are left having to pick up the burden."

He urged industrialized nations to address the imbalance by increasing the number of people they accept.

For 2010, the refugee agency estimated that 747,000 places were required for people in need of resettlement; the 22 countries that accept such refugees, led by the United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden and Norway, took in 98,000 people. The agency estimated that 805,000 places would be needed in 2011.

Last year, 7.2 million people had been in exile for five years or longer, the highest level since 2001. That number owed to the length of the conflicts, the agency said, which prevented people from returning to their homes. Only 197,600 refugees, the lowest number in 21 years, returned home last year.

In all, Mr. Guterres's office said, the number of refugees registered with it and the agency for Palestinian refugees was 15.4 million in 2010. Another 27.5 million people were displaced by conflict within their own countries' borders, the highest level in a decade.