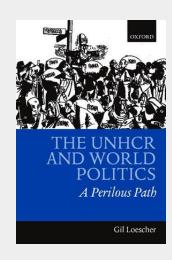
The UNHCR and World Politics

A Perilous Path

Over fifty years ago governments established the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to protect the world's refugees. The UNHCR was created to be a human rights and advocacy organization. But governments also created the agency to promote regional and international stability and to serve the interests of states. Consequently, the UNHCR has always trod a perilous path between its mandate to protect refugees and asylum seekers and the demands placed upon it by states to be a relevant actor in world politics. This is the first independent history of the UNHCR. Gil Loescher, one of the world's leading experts on refugee affairs, draws upon decades of personal experience and research to examine the origins and evolution of the UNHCR as well as to identify many of the major challenges facing the organization in the years ahead. A key focus is to examine the extent to which the evolution of the UNHCR has been framed by the crucial events of international politics during the past half century and how, in turn, the actions of the eight past High Commissioners have helped shape the course of world history. Each chapter tells the story of an individual High Commissioner and examines the unique contributions made to the development of the Office. The history of the last fifty years shows how the UNHCR has initiated and capitalized on international political developments to progressively expand its scope and authority as an important actor in world politics. The book argues that the UNHCR has overstretched itself in recent decades and has strayed from its central human rights protection role. The protection of refugees remains a litmus test of the international community's commitment to defend human rights and to uphold liberal democratic values. Loescher offers a series of bold policy recommendations aimed at making the agency a more effective and accountable advocate for the millions of refugees in the world today.



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