A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Rebuilding lives in safety and dignity

World Refugee Day, 20 June

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

World Refugee Day
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Rebuilding Lives in Safety and Dignity

Over the long course of human conflict, refugees are a relatively modern phenomenon. It is really only in the last 100 years, when the nature of warfare changed from armies fighting each other literally on fields of battle, to whole populations being devastated by aerial bombing, artillery and gas attacks, that the world has witnessed masses of civilians fleeing their homes to seek refuge elsewhere.

In the 55 years since receiving its charter, UNHCR has already helped a staggering 50 million people, uprooted by conflict and forced to leave their homes, to restart their lives. This horrific total does not even include the millions displaced by the two World Wars.

Some 20 million uprooted people are still under UNHCR's protection today, and if you asked any one of them to name what they want most of all, the answer would be almost sure to include the word "home" – to return home or to find a new one. Either way, "home", with all its implied associations of safety, warmth, neighbourliness, self-sufficiency and permanence, is their goal. It is ours too, and when the last person under our care has found a place to call home, we'll willingly take down the UNHCR sign, turn out the lights, and lock the door.

Of course we know that happy day, if it ever arrives, will be a long time coming. So in the meantime we stay very much in business, continuing to pursue our three main missions: providing immediate relief in crisis situations; seeking ways to resolve differences before they affect civilian populations; and helping refugees to find "durable solutions". It is this last mission that provides the theme for this year's World Refugee Day: "A place to call home – rebuilding lives in safety and dignity"

To come even close to our long-term goal requires an enormous effort, serious commitment, and inevitably, a lot of money. "Durable solutions" are not just about physically transporting refugees back to their home towns and villages, or persuading other countries to accept them. Because according to our UN mandate, no refugee under our care may be forced to relocate or return against his or her will, or to conditions which are unsafe or unsuitable. Therefore we have to work in a variety of ways to create conditions that are favourable to return, resettlement or integration into other societies. To do that a hundred and one things, which we more fortunate people often take for granted, first have to be put in place. To name just a few, there needs to be:

- reasonable political stability;
- a functioning social, legal and physical infrastructure;
- guarantees of safety and non-discrimination;
- freedom from persecution -- having to flee again for the same reasons;
- adequate food, water, sanitation and medical services;
- guarantees of legal status and provision of proper documentation;
- freedom of movement;
- removal of mines and unexploded ordnance;
- opportunities for work and potential for self sufficiency;
- language and skills education.

These are just some of the basic rights and services to which all people, including refugees, are entitled, and which of course do not come free. The costs mount even higher when you add in items such as the supply of construction and agricultural "starter kits", home and small-business loan guarantees, and direct financial assistance to host counties to help them cover the cost of absorbing refugee populations. Multiply these by the 20-plus million uprooted people whom we are trying to help find durable solutions, and the enormity of the commitment that is needed can seem overwhelming. Simply put, UNHCR needs all the financial and material help it can get.

In this information kit you will find a number of stories of individual refugees who have successfully returned to their original homes, or integrated into the societies of the countries in which they sought refuge, or who have resettled in asylum countries. Other articles provide examples of how UNHCR has tackled the refugee crises created by various conflicts around the worlds in the recent past. And there are also a dozen background articles on UNHCR, its mandates, its initiatives and agendas, its mission, its statistics, and a glossary. All may be quoted or reproduced freely, and further information can be obtained by contacting local UNHCR offices or visiting **www.unhcr.ch.**

AGENDA FOR PROTECTION

New impetus to the search for durable solutions

The year 2001 was the 50th anniversary of the founding instrument of international refugee protection – the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Rather than seeing it as cause for celebration, some States had begun to criticize the 1951 Convention and its Protocol of 1967 for not being adapted to a number of vexing challenges which had emerged over the years, such as misuse of asylum systems, the problems of "mixed" movements of migrants and refugees, the growth of human smuggling and trafficking, and a mix of "asylum fatigue" on the part of some states hosting refugees and "donor fatigue" on the part of others.

Confident that a wide-ranging and participatory dialogue with all parties would clarify the issues and point the way forward, in December 2000 UNHCR set in motion the *Global Consultations on International Protection.* The aim was to revitalize the 1951 Convention framework, while better equipping countries to address the challenges in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation.

As part of the *Global Consultations* process, UNHCR organized the first ministerial-level gathering of countries party to the Convention and/or its Protocol in five decades. The 2001 Declaration of States Parties adopted there reaffirmed the Convention's central role in assuring the protection of refugees and its enduring importance as the primary refugee protection treaty.

The Agenda for Protection is the program of action resulting from the the *Global Consultations*. It reflects a wide cross section of concerns and contains the concrete recommendations of states, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as refugees themselves on activities to strengthen international protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, and make it easier to implement the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

The Agenda for Protection sets six important overall goals:

1 Strengthen implementation of the Convention and its Protocol
2 Protect refugees within broader migration movements
3 Improve the sharing of the responsibilities and burdens of protecting refugees among states
4 Address security-related concerns more effectively
5 Redouble the search for durable solutions for refugees
6 Meet the protection needs of refugee women and children

While all six goals are important to the protection of refugees, the search for durable solutions is of particular concern, which is why it is under the spotlight in this 2004 World Refugee Day.

Around 20 million refugees under UNHCR care around the world are desperately in need of timely and durable solutions; these depend largely on resolute and sustained international cooperation to resolve refugee situations, some of which have been allowed to drag on for decades, and on support for the three durable solutions: *voluntary repatriation; local integration; and resettlement.*

Of the three solutions, it is generally recognized that *voluntary repatriation* in conditions of safety and dignity remains the preferred solution for refugees. *Local integration* is also instrumental in resolving the plight of many refugees or groups of refugees; and *resettlement* is a durable solution and a vital tool for protection, while also serving as an instrument of international solidarity and burden-sharing.

Bosnian refugees in Croatia

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Redoubling the search for durable solutions: 8 key objectives

1. Realization of comprehensive durable solutions strategies, especially for protracted refugee situations

- *Review of all protracted refugee situations to explore the feasibility of comprehensive plans of action (CPAs), considering each of the three available durable solutions, to be implemented together with countries of origin, host countries, resettlement countries and refugees themselves.*

2. Improved conditions for voluntary repatriation

- *Countries of origin to commit themselves to respecting the right to return and to receiving back their refugees within an acceptable framework of physical, legal and material safety.*
- *Countries of origin to foster reconciliation and dialogue, particularly with refugee communities, and to ensure respect for the rule of law.*
- *States to provide support to countries of origin, to assist them in meeting their7responsibility to ensure the legal, physical and material security of refugees.*
- *Facilitate the participation of refugees, including women, in peace and reconciliation processes to ensure the right to return, and to to encourage repatriation, reintegration and reconciliation.*
- *Countries of origin and asylum to promote voluntary repatriation through tripartite agreements and measures facilitating decisions on return, such as "go-and-see visits", information sessions involving exchanges between refugees and home-country officials, and similar confidence-building measures.*
- *Ensure that gender and age-related issues particular to a repatriation or reintegration programme are identified at an early stage and are fully taken into account in the planning and implementation.*
- *Make sure that both women and men are given an opportunity to make a free and fully informed decision regarding return and to sign individually the Voluntary Repatriation Form.*

3. Strengthened cooperation to make repatriation sustainable

- *Assist the process of reconciliation by ensuring that planning and programming for repatriation include measures to encourage reconciliation, through equal access to essential services and participation in public life for returnees, displaced persons and local residents alike.*
- *Make certain that planning for repatriation includes the early involvement of development partners to ensure the sustainability of repatriation and to facilitate UNHCR's timely and seamless phase out.*
- *Adopt a community-based focus regarding investment in reintegration which benefits returnees as well as the local population, and which accords sufficient priority to housing and essential services, to increase absorption capacity and contribute to reconciliation.*
- *Take measures to ensure equal rights for returnee women in access to housing, property and land restitution.*
- *Give priority to ensuring that education possibilities are available to returnees, and accredit education, vocational or other training received while in exile.*

4. Local integration having its proper place as part of a comprehensive strategy for durable solutions

- *Promote a gender and age-sensitive community-development approach to local integration that takes into account the needs of both the refugees and the local population.*
- *Examine where, when and how to promote the granting of secure legal status and residence rights, including the opportunity to become naturalized citizens of the country of asylum, for refugees who have already attained a considerable degree of socio-economic integration.*
- *Contribute to local integration through burden-sharing to ensure that the necessary resources are available to underpin self-reliance and local integration.*

5. Expand resettlement opportunities

- *Expand the number of countries offering resettlement.*
- *Encourage states that do not yet offer resettlement opportunities actively to consider making some resettlement places available.*
- *Develop capacity-building programmes with new resettlement countries.*
- *States that offer resettlement opportunities to consider increasing their resettlement quotas, diversifying their intake of refugee groups, and introducing more flexible resettlement criteria.*
- *Ensure that resettlement runs in tandem with a more vigorous integration policy, aimed at enabling refugees having durable residence status to enjoy equality of rights and opportunities in the social, economic and cultural life of the country.*

6. More efficient use of resettlement both as a protection tool and as a durable solution

- *Streamline the processing of applications for resettlement, with a stronger focus on protection needs.*
- *Explore the feasibility of establishing a central biometric registration system to support the identification of refugees in need of resettlement.*
- *Examine how to carry out earlier analysis of registration data to anticipate the resettlement needs and to process resettlement applications more rapidly, particularly in emergency situations.*
- *Give increased attention to gender-related protection needs in resettlement programmes, in addition to the women-at-risk category.*
- *Improve methods and mechanisms to minimize the potential for malfeasance and address corruption and fraud.*

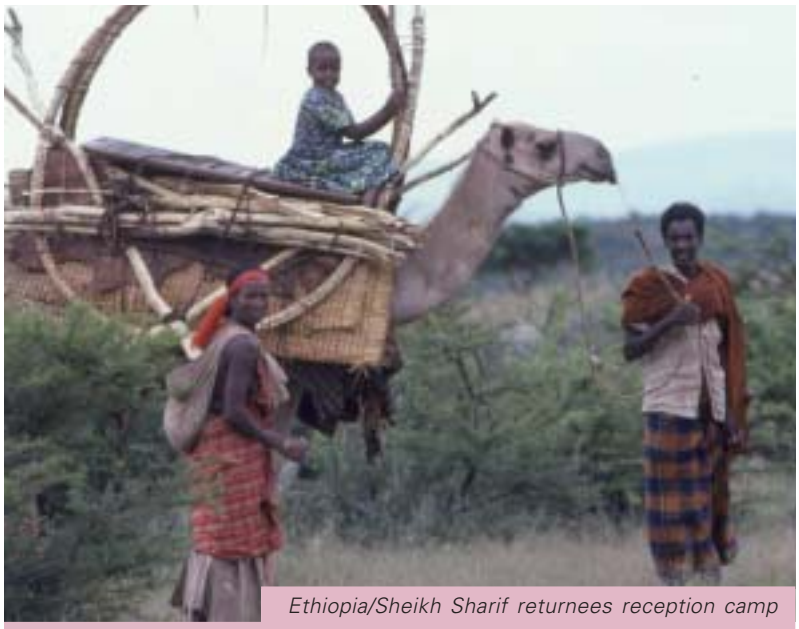
7. Achievement of self-reliance for refugees

- *Ensure that, from the outset, assistance programmes for refugees include strategies for self-reliance and empowerment, with UNHCR playing an active role in mobilizing financial and technical support.*
- *Introduce relief-substitution strategies that tap the resourcefulness and potential of refugee women, in an effort also to avoid the serious protection problems, including sexual and gender-based violence, which can result from over-dependency and idleness.*
- *Expand the possibilities for education, vocational training, and agricultural and other income-generating programmes and, in so doing, benefit men and women equitably.*
- *Ensure that refugees, particularly refugee women and adolescents, and host communities themselves, participate in the design and development of self-reliance programmes.*
- *Work with host countries on further developing integrated approaches that can strengthen the absorption capacity of refugee-hosting areas.*

8. Rehabilitation of refugee-hosting areas in former host countries

- *States, UNHCR and development partners to assess how they can best promote and positively contribute to efforts of the international community to provide for the rehabilitation of refugee-hosting areas in former countries of asylum.*

THE SEARCH FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS



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Ethiopia/Sheikh Sharif returnees reception camp Jijiga / Ogadew

Refugees are unwilling pawns in a game over which they have no control. For whatever reason – usually persecution or conflict – they have been presented with the stark choice of either facing death and destruction or fleeing their homes and communities. Forced to accept the latter option, they find themselves uprooted and living in an alien and sometimes hostile environment that, while certainly safer than the one from which they have escaped, cannot in any way be thought of as "home".

Virtually by definition, therefore, the state of being a refugee is at best an interim solution. It is a temporary response to an immediate problem that is in need of a durable solution – one which is acceptable to the refugees themselves, and accommodates their needs and rights. But because this situation must not be allowed to become a permanent one for either the host country or the refugees, one of UNHCR's main priorities is to find a satisfactory way to resolve the problem as expediently as possible. Logically, the best solution is to create the conditions in which people no longer need to be refugees, either because they have been able to return home in safety and dignity, or have successfully integrated into their country of refuge, or have put down roots in a third country willing to resettle them.

So, although the protection of refugees remains the mandate of UNHCR, our ultimate goal has always been to work for durable solutions so that refugees no longer need our protection. In other words, to help them re-establish that most basic of human needs, a place to call home free of threats to life and liberty.

Of the 50 million persons displaced in the world for a range of reasons, 20 million are living under the protection of UNHCR. For them, three main routes are open in finding a durable solution, all of them voluntary – meaning that every effort is made to make them fully aware of the pros and cons of each option. In the case of repatriation, for example, the UNHCR standards for voluntary repatriation foresee that the choice of destination is up to the individual or family, and that the authorities should not interfere with that choice. Indeed, to help them with their decision on return, arrangements may be made for them to preview the conditions that prevail through "go and see" visits, and to talk with the authorities from their country of origin through "come and talk" programmes.

Thus every individual or family is strongly encouraged to make an informed and free decision whether or not to accept one of the following:

- Voluntary repatriation to the country of origin: in which conditions that caused them to flee have been reversed and the situation has improved sufficiently for them to regain their homes.
- Local integration: in which refugees are able to put down roots in the country of asylum.
- Resettlement: in which individuals, families and even communities are voluntarily resettled into a new, third-party country and are integrated into its social fabric.

"We must invest in finding durable solutions for the millions of refugees and internally displaced Afghans, for to invest in them is to invest in the future peace and stability of the region." **Ruud Lubbers**

Framework for Durable Solutions

Through its activities for refugees and returnees, UNHCR promotes international efforts in prevention, conflict resolution and peace building. Humanitarian actors such as UNHCR have an important role to ensure that solutions are sustainable.

This, however, cannot be done effectively without an integrated effort of humanitarian and development actors. The objective of empowerment of refugees and returnees should therefore be given due consideration by all. As a result, the High Commissioner issued the Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern in May 2003. This provides policy guidance on sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably, on building capacities to receive and protect refugees, and on redoubling the search for durable solutions. The major components of the Framework for Durable Solutions are: "DAR" – Development Assistance for Refugees – for protracted refugee situations; "4Rs" – Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction – for voluntary repatriation; and, "DLI" – Development through Local Integration – for local integration.

Voluntary repatriation

Being able to return to their country of origin in safety and dignity is widely recognized as the most desirable durable solution, and the one generally preferred both by UNHCR and most refugees.

The 4Rs initiative

"We came back because we heard there was peace and security. But there is no work and no place we can afford to live. We have freedom now, but we cannot eat that."

When refugees finally are able go back home, they often return to a country gutted by conflict and ravaged by hate. Emotions can run high; their absence might be judged as desertion, and they may still be the target of the ethnic rivalries which erupted and caused them to flee in the first place. Peace agreements are often developed without the participation of the refugees -- sometimes without even taking their existence into account. As High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers puts it, "While returning home is one thing, staying home can be quite another. That is why it is crucial that the international community work to ensure that refugee returns are sustainable through large-scale post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes and projects in countries of origin."

In recent years he has placed renewed emphasis on the search for durable solutions, making it the cornerstone of UNHCR's mandate. In dealing with the return of refugees, Lubbers has proposed what he terms the "4Rs" – Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction – which is aimed at helping to bridge the gap between "humanitarian" and "development" work – a distinction that has failed in the past to recognize the transitional nature of the relief-to-development process. Humanitarian and development actors need to work more closely from the outset of an operation and during the crucial transitional phase, and by proposing the 4Rs programme, Lubbers has suggested ways in which the UN system and the World Bank can strengthen their cooperation and collaborate in developing the plan.

After 20 years of civial war, Angolan refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo line up to go home

©UNHCR/S.Hopper, 2003

Local integration

In some cases the conditions in the country of origin are so unstable, and hope of improvement in the foreseeable future remains so dim, that settling in the country of asylum becomes a better option than repatriation. Indeed, some conflicts are so protracted that even if conditions ultimately return to an acceptable level, many refugees have lived in the country of asylum for so long that they have no real motivation to return as strangers in their own lands. Often they have married into the local community, and already feel at home there, so formal integration with full legal rights enables them to cease being refugees.

Local integration therefore remains an important durable solution in a number of situations, although it usually requires investment in public confidence-building. The challenge is to maximize the potential of refugees for local communities, so that they are seen to be a positive economic asset for the host country, and contribute to the development of localities and regions. Particularly successful are cases where self-sufficient refugees were able to benefit hosts as a source of labour and expertise, and by expanding the local consumer markets. Also, in a number of developing countries with limited resources, helping refugees to become self-sufficient has led to increased foreign aid and attracted development projects that are benefiting the community as a whole.

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In dealing with the local integration of refugees, the High Commissioner has proposed what he terms the "DLI" or Development through Local Integration. DLI would be applied in protracted refugee situations where the state opts to provide opportunities for the gradual integration of refugees. By soliciting additional development funds for durable solutions through local integration, better quality of life and self-reliance for refugees would be achieved along with improvements in the quality of life for host communities.

In 2004, the main resettlement countries were: United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, New Zealand and Denmark. Eight new host countries are: Brazil, Chile, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ireland, Iceland, United Kingdom and Spain.

Resettlement

Sometimes, when refugees' lives are at risk, resettlement in a safe country is the only way to protect persecuted or endangered people. For example, they may be denied basic human rights in their country of refuge. Their lives may be threatened for racial, political or religious reasons, or by attacks directed from outside. Local authorities may be unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection. Resettlement may also be used for survivors of torture, or for disabled, injured and severely traumatized refugees who are unable to obtain treatment in their country of refuge. Resettlement is not a "solution of last resort" but a principal objective -- a tool of international protection and a durable solution that strengthens the principle of first asylum and helps solve long-standing refugee problems in a spirit of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

UNHCR Resettlement criteria

UNHCR states, in part, that resettlement is geared primarily to the special needs of refugees whose lives, liberty, safety or other fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where the have sought refuge. The decision to resettle a refugee is normally taken when there is no alternative way to guarantee his/her legal or physical security.

There are now 16 countries on most continents which offer resettlement places, and UNHCR has continued to work to build their capacity to accept refugees, to expand resettlement by fostering new resettlement countries, and increase the number and quality of resettlement places in existing countries.

Efforts are being made to promote greater flexibility in accepting UNHCR's resettlement criteria (see box). This is especially crucial for refugees who have been in limbo for many years or have particular protection needs in the country of asylum. Especially difficult to resettle are adolescent boys, and one recent success was the resettlement in the USA of a group of some 2,000 youths who had come to be known as the "lost boys" because of their repeated displacement in East Africa.

Source: UN document A / AC.96 / 951 Note on International Protection, 13/09/2001
UNHCR Resettlement Handbook
Refugees Magazine n°127, 2002, p.31

PREPARING THE GROUND:

MAKING SURE A SUCCESSFUL REPATRIATION STAYS SUCCESSFUL

No refugee wants to stay a refugee. The majority of refugees under UNHCR protection would prefer to return to the homes and communities from which they were forced to flee, provided of course that the conditions that caused them to leave in the first place have been rectified, or at least abated sufficiently for them to feel safe enough to return voluntarily. So, from UNHCR's perspective, the core of voluntary repatriation is return in and to conditions of physical, legal and material safety, leading to full restoration of national protection.

But even when peace has returned to their homeland, conditions may still be far from safe for returnees to resume their old lives. Violence, especially civil wars and other protracted political, ethnic and territorial conflicts, tend to leave both the land and government and social infrastructure devastated, so that the returnees must try to rebuild their lives in a landscape that is literally and metaphorically a minefield of unseen dangers.

Before conditions can be deemed ripe to accept the orderly and voluntary reintegration of a refugee population, and for a durable, self-sustaining solution to have a chance of success, a number of physical, legal and economical conditions must be defined and implemented. For reintegration to be "sustainable" the ground needs to be carefully prepared. The core components of "return in safety and with dignity", and UNHCR's role in relation to these, are as follows.

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A Congolese refugee in Pretoria, Republic of South Africa.

PHYSICAL SAFETY

In nearly all cases safety considerations will be the first and most serious concern. The safety of returnees must be assured by the authorities, and be supported and monitored as necessary by the international community. Following the cessation of hostilities, an independent judiciary, and law enforcement that is compliant with human rights, needs to be established.

Mines

The presence of mines and unexploded ordinance is the most widespread and frequent threat to returnees, so de-mining and mine-awareness training programmes are absolutely essential.

Evacuation to save lives

UNHCR does not normally assist return to unsafe areas, and cannot be involved in involuntary or forced return. Only in cases where security conditions in countries of asylum have become more dangerous than the situation in the country of origin, may UNHCR decide to assist the return in conditions which do not meet minimum standards of safety. This then becomes an evacuation to save lives.

Military involvement
In post-conflict situations, UNHCR often needs to liaise with military forces, be they local regular or irregular forces or UN peacekeepers. Interaction is most successful when based on a clear delineation of responsibilities between military and humanitarian roles, capitalizing on the added security without compromising the civilian nature of a humanitarian operation. Assistance activities should only be undertaken by military personnel when supervised by civilian aid workers.

LEGAL SAFETY

Legal systems in countries of origin often need to be restored and/or reformed. UNHCR traditionally works towards removing legal and administrative barriers to return, and provides expert advice and technical support for the drafting of legislation related to citizenship, property, documentation and return.

Amnesty
Drafting and enforcement of amnesty laws are most important at the early stages of repatriation and serve to encourage return. They exempt returnees from discrimination or punishment for the sole fact of having fled the country, while also dealing with issues of military conscription, desertion, or service in other armed forces. UNHCR promotes the adoption of amnesties, except for war criminals.

Nationality
Only with an effective nationality can individuals exercise their basic civil, political and economic rights. In the context of return, loss of nationality, unclear nationality status, or changes in personal status through marriage are the most common problems faced by returnees. UNHCR works with states to resolve the problems of stateless persons and to avoid new situations of statelessness from occurring.

Certification and registration
Linked to nationality are questions of registration and documentation, access to birth, marriage, adoption, divorce or death records – as well as other documentation related to personal status, particularly if these were issued by the country of asylum. UNHCR works to resolve these problems, and also promotes the issuance of identity documents and other documents from public records, as well as the recognition of equivalency of educational qualifications.

Housing and property restitution
Repatriation is likely to be less successful if refugees are not able to recover their houses and property. It is therefore important that housing, property and land restitution issues are addressed at an early stage. The right to return is closely linked with the right to adequate housing, which in this context is understood to mean the right not to be deprived of property in the first place. Thus refugees have the right to recover the homes from which they fled or were evicted.

Compensation
If restitution is not possible, the right to adequate compensation for any loss suffered should apply. Special efforts are sometimes necessary to enable returning women to exercise property and inheritance rights.

Rebuilding the administration
In post-conflict situations, the basic administrative and judicial infrastructure is often dysfunctional, lacks resources and may have to overcome flawed procedures, discriminatory legal actions and excessive fees and taxation. UNHCR's role can involve setting up training programmes for local judges and lawyers, facilitating conflict-resolution mechanisms, and providing material support for building administrative and judicial structures. UNHCR has often been instrumental in creating legal advice centres to ensure returnees have access to effective recourse in case of problems upon their return.

Returnees in Guatemala arrive at Quetzal village.

©UNHCR/L.Astrom, 1989

MATERIAL SAFETY

Material safety in the early phases of return implies survival: access to basic services such as potable water, health services and education. UNHCR thus aims first to increase the availability of basic services in situations where they have collapsed, are of poor quality or are insufficient for large numbers of returnees, and to ensure free access to available public services.

Absorption capacity
Premature returns to areas with little or no absorption capacity could lead to competition for scarce resources among returnees or between returnees and local communities. UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programmes necessarily take into account the absorption capacity of the receiving location.

Self-reliance
For return to be sustainable, promoting self-reliance and reducing the need for continuing external support is crucial. Returnees generally require help to reintegrate through income-generating activities; UNHCR's assistance is limited to the most vulnerable returnees during an initial period through skills training, micro-financing and credit programmes.

Where the majority of returnees are rural, seeds, tools and some building materials can be provided by UNHCR, while more ambitious development schemes are the task of development partners. Recovery of land or restitution of land rights for farming are also crucial to reestablishment of livelihoods.

Jobs reinstatement
UNHCR may also facilitate the reinstatement of civil servants, teachers, medical professionals and others into their former positions.

Reconciliation
Reconciliation is a key challenge in deeply divided communities, and can rarely be achieved rapidly. While it is fundamentally an internal process between communities, it can benefit from international support, especially where the people or their leaders are unable or unwilling to take the first steps. UNHCR and others can assist through measures promoting equity between displaced persons and local residents.

Confidence building
Structures and mechanisms which promote co-existence are increasingly part of UNHCR's programmes.

Malian returnees at a water point.

©UNHCR/C.Shirley, 1997

> ***"Long-term durable solutions are without doubt the best investment that we can make in peace and stability."***
>
> **Ruud Lubbers**

These include useful confidence-building schemes such as arranging "go-and-see" visits prior to making a commitment to return, organizing inter-community bus lines, setting up community-based coexistence projects, promoting women's initiatives and face-to-face meetings. The documentation of past violations and abuses and local, national or international structures such as truth commissions, which provide accountability for human rights violations, also increasingly attract international support.

Making it work: activities to implement voluntary repatriation

To summarize, UNHCR works both with the countries of asylum and origin to create an acceptable framework within which to implement voluntary repatriation. The following sets out activities UNHCR pursues to this end.

In general:

- Invite refugees, including women, to participate in peace negotiations.
- Include references in peace agreements to the right to return and other standards relating to voluntary repatriation.
- Work towards agreements on voluntary repatriation, and make them operational.
- Develop, from the outset, partnerships with other multilateral and bilateral actors, ranging from the local authorities in the countries of asylum and origin to NGOs.
- Ensure involvement of the local authorities and make use of local capacities and resources.
- Ensure free access by UNHCR to refugees and returnees at all stages of the voluntary repatriation process, including for a period after return.
- Facilitate fair, expeditious, simple, transparent and non-discriminatory arrangements for the actual return.
- Provide immediate material or financial support to enable return and reestablishment during an initial phase.

In the country of asylum

- Plan for the return by establishing a profile of the refugee population (with information such as the villages of origin, age and gender breakdown, skills profiles, special requirements, etc.).
- Ensure a free and informed choice by providing accurate and objective information and access to counselling.
- Enable the participation of different age- and gender groups in the decision-making process.
- Negotiate continued protection and assistance for those unwilling or unable to return.

In the country of origin

- Undertake an analysis of the obstacles to return.
- Ensure that return is acceptable to the country of origin, including the local authorities.
- Encourage the country of origin to promulgate amnesties and other legal guarantees for returnees.
- Establish a substantial UNHCR field presence to promote actions required at the national and local levels to enable actual return in safety; to organize "go-and-see" visits; to promote confidence-building measures, including dialogue between community leaders and local authorities; to lobby for making conditions conducive to return; and to help to prevent security incidents directed against returnees, or at least to pursue an appropriately documented follow-up with the authorities.
- Undertake systematic returnee monitoring to identify protection issues and assistance needs; to design appropriate protection and assistance interventions; and to collect relevant country of origin information for potential returnees, host countries and other actors.
- Ensure the inclusion of returnees and areas of return in national recovery and reconstruction plans.

Framework for Durable Solutions for May 2003

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Resettled Vietnamese refugees enjoying their new life in Sweden,

A RETURNEE BILL OF RIGHTS:

There can be very few people left on this planet who, while not always benefiting from them, are not aware of the subject of human rights. Certainly the rights of the refugees who live under the protection of UNHCR have long been universally agreed by the signatory States of the 1951 Convention. But what of the rights of those who cease to be refugees, either because they have returned voluntarily to their original home countries, or have successfully integrated locally into the society of their host countries? Because they are no longer refugees, are their rights still recognized and protected?

Who is covered?
The standards regularly set out in tripartite voluntary repatriation agreements promise to protect the rights of "persons who are currently outside the country and whose return raises protection considerations. They are referred to as 'persons of concern to UNHCR' or 'returnees', and comprise citizens, former habitual residents and former citizens who were arbitrarily deprived of their nationality".

These standards are normally part of agreements between the country of origin, the host country and UNHCR, also lays the groundwork for a successful durable outcome by ensuring that "the return process will take place in safety and dignity, as well as in a phased, orderly and humane manner". In cases where return is impossible because conditions in the country of origin are still unsatisfactory or dangerous, "the governments of host countries regularly agree that they will provide an appropriate status for persons unable to return due to continued international protection needs and compelling humanitarian reasons."

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Vietnamese boat people make a stop at Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport before retunring to their home country.

Voluntary repatriation agreements form a de facto Returnee Bill of Rights which is designed to cover all of the basic needs and rights of returnees. In essence, these include:

Right to return
All persons of concern to UNHCR have the right freely to return to their country, either to their places of origin or former habitual residence or to any other place of their choice in the country of origin.

Right to choose where to settle
The choice of destination is up to the individual or family, and the authorities will not interfere with the returnees' choice of destination. In particular, returnees should not have to move to areas of insecurity or to areas lacking in the basic infrastructure necessary to reestablish livelihoods after return. Situations should be avoided in which returnees are forced into internal displacement or to accommodation whose ownership or occupancy is disputed.

Freedom from Risk of Persecution, Unlawful Detention and Discrimination
Refugees must be permitted to return in safety, without risk of persecution, unlawful detention or discrimination, particularly where this is due to their departure or on account of their status as refugees, political activities or affiliation, ethnic origin or religious belief.

Immunity from Prosecution
The authorities will consider an amnesty to encourage persons to return without fear of prosecution or any punitive measures on account of having left, and remained outside, their country of origin. This obviously cannot cover crimes against peace, a war crime, a crime against humanity, or acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

UNHCR/N.Behring

Southern Sudanese Refugees in Bonga Camp, western Ethiopia: food distribution

Restitution of Property or Compensation
Returnees have the right to have any property restored which was illegally or arbitrarily taken from them. They have the right to restitution, and where property cannot be restored must be justly and fairly compensated. This right includes returning women whose husbands have died or are missing, alternative housing or land should also be made available for current occupants of refugee property who are equally affected by displacement or who have no place to return to.

Registration and Documentation
The authorities will recognize the legal status of returnees and any changes that have occurred (such as births, deaths, adoptions, marriages and divorces) and any documentation issued by valid institutions in the country of origin or elsewhere.

Statelessness
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that "Everyone has the right to a nationality." But in an era of increasing ethnic tension and mass migration of people, the number of stateless persons is growing as governments become more reluctant to 'welcome' refugees. Effectively, they are outcasts from the global political system. Not recognized by any state as citizens, they are trapped in a legal limbo, with no access to such basic rights as health, education and political choice.

For refugees, especially those returning to their origins in what in the meantime have become newly-created states, exclusion from legal identity and statelessness must be avoided. It is their right to expect that any nationality disputes will be resolved on returnees' arrival, and every effort will be made to accord them an appropriate legal status.

"I was seven when I fled. I can't even remember anything about my own village. But I will be proud when I return there."

Naturalization
Spouses and children of returnees who are citizens of other countries will be permitted to enter and remain in the country of origin. This will also apply to widowed spouses and children of nationals who may wish to enter or remain in the country of origin. The authorities will consider favourably their naturalization and visas will be issued without delay.

Family Unity
Every effort will be made to ensure that families are repatriated as units, and that involuntary separation is avoided. Where such efforts fail, a mechanism will be established for their reunification, be it in the host country or in the country of origin, in accordance with national law in the countries concerned.

Access to Basic Services
With the support of UN and other organizations, steps will be taken to improve the non-discriminatory availability of basic services such as food, potable water, shelter, health care and education.

Recognition of Academic and Vocational Skills
To facilitate reintegration, the authorities will recognize academic and vocational skills diplomas, certificates or degrees acquired by returnees while abroad.

Special Needs and Vulnerable Persons
Special measures will be taken to ensure that vulnerable groups receive adequate protection, assistance and care throughout the repatriation and reintegration process. In particular unaccompanied or separated minors should not be returned before family members have been traced, or before specific and adequate reception and care arrangements have been put in place.

Unhindered Access to and by UNHCR
UNHCR will be given free and unhindered access to all returnees, be they still in host countries or in the country of origin. The authorities will allow UNHCR to monitor the treatment of returnees in accordance with international standards. The authorities will inform UNHCR of any arrests, detentions and penal proceedings involving returnees; they will make available relevant documentation and permit staff prompt and unhindered access to such returnees.

THE 4RS PROGRAMME

©UNHCR

The Old Believers from North China arrive in Hong Kong on their way for resettlement in Brazil.

The 4Rs programme is intended to serve as an overall framework for institutional collaboration in the implementation of reintegration operations in post-conflict situations. It is designed to allow maximum flexibility for field operations to pursue country-specific approaches.

For millions of refugees, voluntary repatriation and reintegration remains the most preferred durable solution to their plight, and a key priority for the international community is to engineer a smooth transition from the initial emergency relief stage to longer-term development. The 4Rs programme aims to achieve this through the related processes of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction. It links all four processes to reduce poverty and to make possible the durable solutions that refugees so desperately need. This integrated approach would also encourage a number of desired outcomes. These include good local governance, protection of the rights of returnees, improved social services and infrastructure, economic revival and livelihood creation, and improved access to services.

Why the 4Rs approach is needed

Following the initial reinsertion operation and its associated emergency-type assistance, the subsequent process of reintegration and longer-term reconstruction usually does not occur in a seamless fashion. In the politically fragile environment which is characteristic of post-conflict situations, returnees are often left in a deprived condition for extended periods without the means to provide for themselves and with few opportunities to carve out a better future. Living in idleness creates despair, which in turn breeds violence (especially against women) and also criminality, and encourages exploitation.

> ***"we want... not only repatriation but re-integration and link it with rehabilitation and reconstruction."***
>
> **Ruud Lubbers**

In the past, the needs of returnees have often not been incorporated in the transition and recovery plans by the governments concerned, the donor community and even the UN system. Returnees rarely feature in national development plans, and development projects are often undertaken without giving thought to the useful and productive capacities of returnees. Rather than being thought of as an economic burden, these populations should be seen as human capital that can contribute to the recovery process by becoming productive members of the society. Indeed, ignoring their ability to contribute to the country's rebuilding efforts is little more than the frivolous waste of a valuable resource.

Another problem that occurs when reintegration is not sustainable is the phenomenon of back-flows, in which returnees, choosing the lesser of two evils, opt to go back to their country of asylum rather than continue to struggle fruitlessly in their own country.

UNHCR's role

The programme envisages UNHCR taking the lead on repatriation, while the lead on reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction would be agreed upon by the UN Country Team and the World Bank. The planning and implementation of 4Rs programmes would take place in an integrated manner, with strong engagement by the UN Country Team, particularly UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors. The government would show its strong commitment, and assume ownership of the entire process.

In its initial role, UNHCR would focus on support activities that facilitate the early reintegration or reinsertion of returnees. These include monitoring protection agreements, providing for the repair or reconstruction of family shelters, supporting small-scale micro-credit schemes and other productive activities, and helping restore essential water, educational and health services in returnee communities. This first "R" would also serve as a framework for the co-ordinated phasing out of UNHCR, and the phasing in of the development agencies.

In the case of the remaining three "Rs", reintegration would continue to involve UNHCR in a joint leading role, together with UNDP. While development programmes are under way, UNHCR's areas of concern would be limited to the initial reinsertion and reintegration of returnees, and of course UNHCR would put its extensive human resources and field experience at the disposal of the other agencies such as World Bank, World Food Programme, UNICEF etc. Interfacing with receiving communities and officials, as well as other development agencies, would be coordinated by UNDP as part of the third "R", rehabilitation, while the fourth "R", reconstruction, would be the responsibility of the development funding specialists, World Bank and UNDP.

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Liberians refugees in Largo camp, Sierra Leone.

Already a practical reality

Having wholeheartedly approved the 4Rs initiative, the World Bank, UNDP and UNHCR agreed at their focal points meeting in New York on 12 September 2002 to test the practicalities and pitfalls in real situations in order to establish "Rules for Engagement" and to develop clear benchmarks against which to measure progress. Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan were selected as pilot countries in which to launch the initiative, and so far are successfully demonstrating the value of the 4Rs approach.

Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern May 2003

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEES

Internally displaced Chechens in tented camp A, Sunzhenski district..

©UNHCR/T. Makeeva

The road to self-reliance

In the search for durable solutions, it is clear that the more returning refugees can be encouraged to stand on their own feet and cease to be dependent on outside support, the greater the chances of success, and the more durable that solution is likely to be. If some headway can be made towards self-reliance while they are still refugees in the host countries, so much the better. But simply providing more money is no answer, and it is also clear that a carefully worked-out programme that takes into account a host of practical, psychological and economic factors is needed.

Out of sight…out of mind

Because most of the countries with large refugee populations are poor (over 60% of the people under UNHCR's protection are in developing countries, and half of those are in the 49 poorest nations), one of the biggest hurdles to be overcome is the sheer lack of interest on the part of the authorities in the host country in helping refugees still on their territory become self-reliant. Unless they are able to be integrated locally, refugees are often seen as second-class citizens because they are not part of the government's constituency and do not figure in its development plans. Also, as they tend to be located in remote areas, they are a classic case of "out of sight, out of mind", both for the government and for the development agencies who must toe the government line. They are simply no longer a priority.

Dependency

In protracted situations, some of which may last for years or even decades, the problem becomes progressively worse: the constant presence of these uninvited foreign communities tends to irritate the local population, and even build up resentment to the point that it can create instability in the host country. Perhaps even worse, the years of soul-destroying inactivity and total reliance on others for food and shelter creates what is called "dependency syndrome" which becomes more entrenched as time goes by.

Refugees as assets

But refugees are in reality no different from any other segment of society. They have the same talents and abilities, the same ambitions, the same potential for achievement and independence. The difference is that these have been suppressed by the traumatic events that forced them into the confinement of a refugee camp in a foreign land.

Given this potential, there is no doubt that refugees, with the right kind of assistance, can actually contribute to their host society. They have courage, determination, and the will, not just to survive, but to thrive. Women in particular show great resilience and astonishing survival skills.

With proper support, such as right to freedom of movement, access to education, skills training and income-generating activities, refugees can attain a degree of self-reliance which will make them less dependent on humanitarian assistance and even enable them to start contributing to the economic development of their host country. In short, to a host country, the presence of such a pool of potential talent and productivity should be looked on as a valuable asset and a tool for development.

Returning or resettling equipped with hope and skills

Once they have made the journey back home to their country of origin, returnees cannot expect the same level of assistance as before. Often their country is in the throes of post-conflict reconstruction, and the problems of the returnees must take a back seat to the much larger one of rebuilding an entire country and its socio-economic structures. Obviously any skills they may have acquired prior to their return will speed up the reintegration process. Or if they are being resettled in a third country, their potential for early self-sufficiency will make them more easily accepted by the local community and more swiftly integrated into it.

The DAR initiative

In order to provide refugees with the skills and means to achieve early self-reliance, in 2003 UNHCR proposed an initiative called Development Assistance for Refugees, or DAR for short., This is a broad-based partnership involving governments, development agencies, humanitarian organizations and others, and absolutely key to its success is the commitment of local governments. The programme's main objectives are:

- To better share the burden for countries hosting large numbers of refugees: They are increasingly critical of the support they receive to deal with the situation, and want to be helped in a more significant and effective way.
- To better equip refugees to meet the challenges of reintegration into their own country, integration in the country hosting them, or resettlement into another country.
- To reduce resentment by improving the quality of life of the local people, most of whom live in remote and impoverished areas, and who often see refugees receiving more than they themselves have.

©UNHCR/N.Behring

Food distribution: tribal ceremony.

The DLI programme

A related programme was also proposed by UNHCR at the same time. Named Development through Local Integration (DLI), it is designed to solicit additional development assistance with the aim of attaining a durable solution via the local integration option. Central to the success of this strategy is the attitude of the host government and the local authorities. DLI therefore builds on DAR, and is an option and not an obligation of a refugee hosting country. Equally important to the success of DLI strategy is the commitment on the part of the donor community to provide additional assistance.

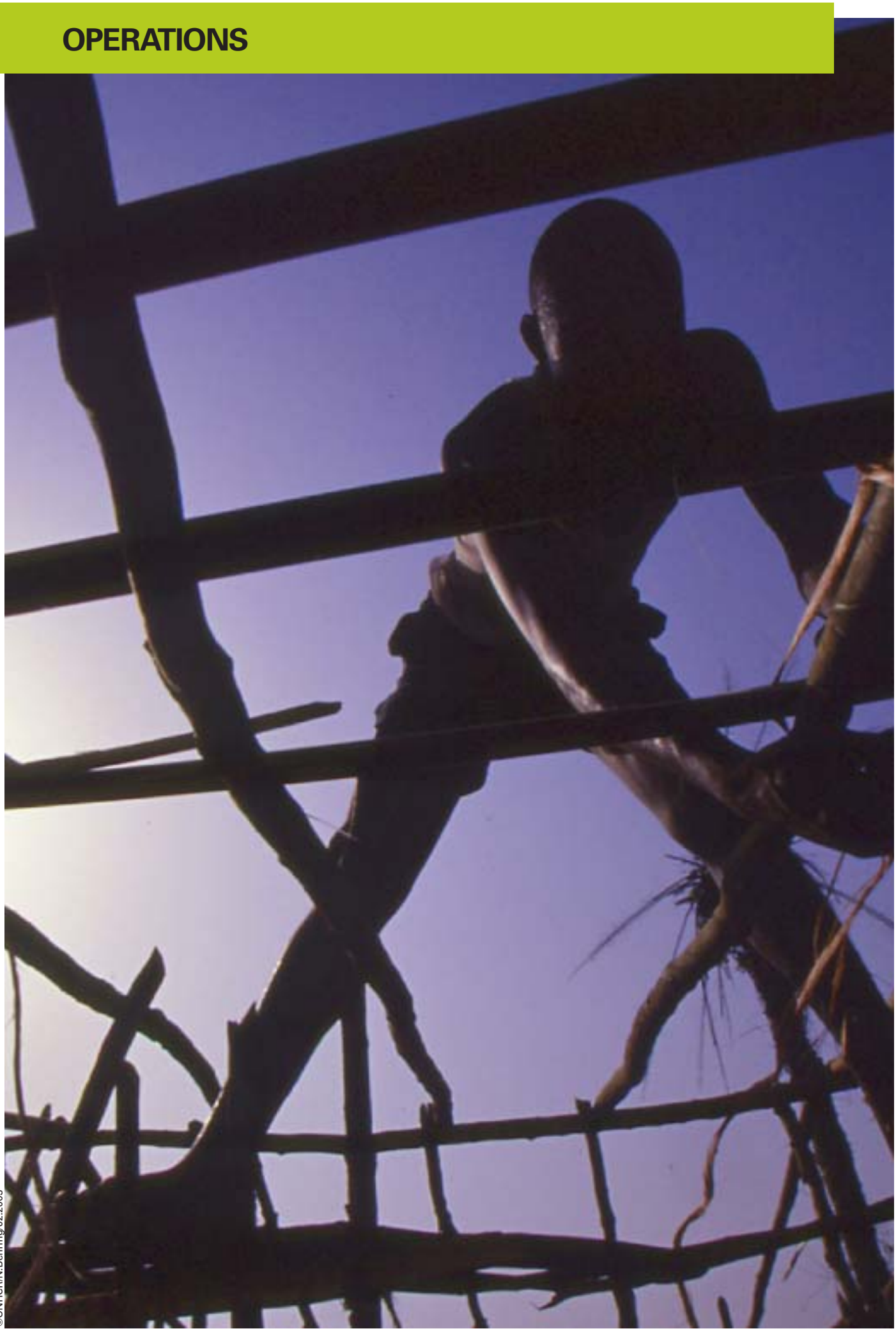
As with DAR, the DLI approach envisions broad-based partnerships between governments, humanitarian, and both multi-and bilateral development agencies. The mix of partnerships may vary from country to country, but an invariable and essential component will be the commitment of the relevant host government and its related central and local authorities for the local integration of refugees.

DLI would be applied in protracted refugee situations where the state opts to provide opportunities for the gradual integration of refugees. By soliciting additional development funds for durable solutions through local integration, better quality of life and self-reliance for refugees would be achieved along with improvements in the quality of life for host communities

While it is obviously too early to report on the results of the DAR and DLI initiatives, they have been enthusiastically received by all the interested parties, and early indications are very positive.

Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern May 2003

OPERATIONS



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CENTRAL AMERICA

Background

The civil conflicts that engulfed El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua in the 1970s and 1980s forced more than two million people to flee their homes. Of those who crossed international borders, fewer than 150,000 were officially recognized as refugees by host governments in the region, and they found only relative safety in the countries to which they fled. Host governments became increasingly concerned about large refugee populations which could not easily be integrated and which they regarded as security threats. They were therefore eager for repatriation to take place.

©UNHCR/A.Aarhus, 1987

Returning Salvadorian refugees en route to Vucetas, in Chalatenango Province.

In 1989, as the Cold War ended, external powers which had been involved in these conflicts—particularly the United States—were persuaded to support regional peace efforts. In addition, a number of initiatives taken by the refugees themselves helped to build peace in the region. First in El Salvador in the late 1980s, and then in Guatemala in the early 1990s, refugees began organizing large-scale returns without waiting for official peace agreements to be signed.

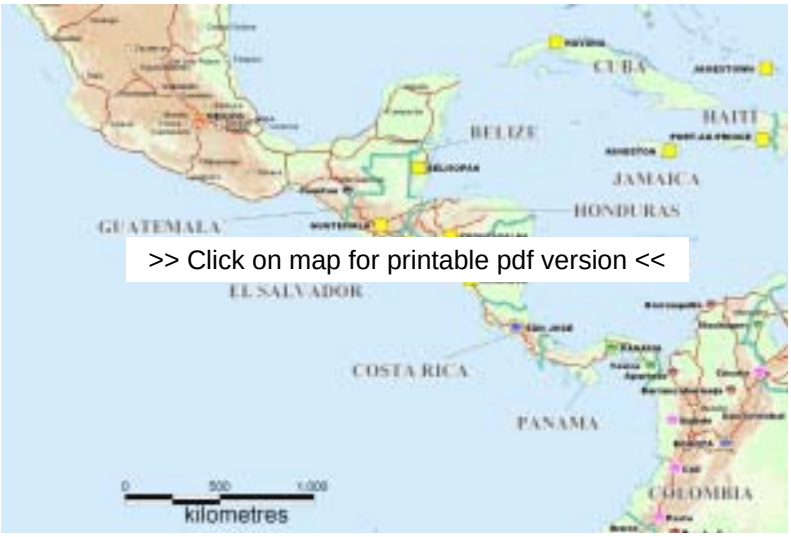
El Salvador

Before the conclusion of the UN-brokered negotiations to end the conflict, Salvadoran refugees in Honduras announced that they would begin returning in organized groups. Paying scant regard to the ongoing conflict, they settled in places of their own choice, despite questionable claims to the land. Since their safety could not be guaranteed, UNHCR was not willing at that stage to promote or facilitate the repatriation. Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s all of the registered Salvadoran refugees in neighbouring countries—some 32,000—had repatriated.

Guatemala

Following the Salvadoran example, a number of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico also repatriated in organized groups. This time the conditions of their return were negotiated with both the Guatemalan government and UNHCR, though the success of the operation was somewhat inhibited by the shortage of available fertile land. Still, the assistance provided by UNHCR to the Guatemalan refugees was extremely high compared with other repatriation programmes. Significant efforts were put into working with refugee women and encouraging their participation in the community, and the programme to assist returnees in recovering identity papers and other personal documentation successfully built upon UNHCR's earlier experience in El Salvador.

Between 1984 and June 1999, when the UNHCR-assisted repatriation programme ended, some 42,000 refugees repatriated from Mexico, while a further 22,000, about half of whom were born there, accepted the Mexican government's offer to settle permanently.



Nicaragua

Only after the 1990 electoral defeat of the ruling Sandinista government and the return of peace did large-scale repatriation take place, when most of the 72,000 refugees, 350,000 internally displaced people and 30,000 former combatants returned to their homes. This was significantly different from the Salvadoran and Guatemalan returns, which began before formal peace agreements had been concluded, and which led UNHCR to define more clearly its policies on when to promote and when to facilitate voluntary repatriation.

> ***"Refugees are not simply the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. They are potential contributors to development - both in their countries of asylum and upon their return home."***
>
> **Ruud Lubbers**

Reconstruction: The CIREFCA process

The International Conference on Central American Refugees or CIREFCA was held in Guatemala City in May 1989. It constitutes a milestone in the search for durable solutions to the problem of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in the region. Indeed, the 56 participating States adopted a three-year Concerted Plan of Action, through which well over US$ 300 million were channeled for projects promoting security, local and productive infrastructure and self-sufficiency. At these UN-led negotiations, political leaders and opposition groups insisted that peace and development should go hand in hand, and sought a comprehensive plan for regional reconstruction. Donors decided to channel funds through UNHCR and UNDP, and to implement a range of projects targeting all the war-affected groups. It was agreed that funds should be used not to assist individual returnee families, but to support entire communities and affected areas. This initiative became known as the CIREFCA process, and until the end of 1994, it involved coordinated national, regional and international action to achieve lasting solutions to the problems of displacement in the region. Strongly supported by donors, local political leaders promised to link solutions for refugees, returnees and internally displaced people to national dialogue and reconciliation.

The CIREFCA framework proved to be one of the most important innovations to come from the region. It promoted community-level projects, consensus-building among regional leaders, communication between governments and NGOs, and communication among the many different NGOs in the region. It also enabled UNHCR to address the needs of returning refugees and displaced people in a more comprehensive manner than ever before. And it marked the first time that UNHCR and UNDP had worked closely together over a long period in the design and implementation of programmes.

Quick impact projects

Of the several CIREFCA initiatives, the most innovative and influential in future repatriation operations were the quick impact projects, which were first implemented on a large scale in Nicaragua. Mostly micro-projects, they often involved the rehabilitation of clinics, schools and water systems, or aimed at creating income-generating opportunities. They required a modest injection of funds and a great deal of community involvement; they addressed urgent needs identified by community members, and were carried out in communities with large numbers of recent returnees. They encouraged people to share ideas, skills and resources, and helped reduce tensions between former adversaries. Ultimately, these projects were seen not only as innovative but also as essential to successful reintegration and reconciliation.

Lessons learned

In Central America it became increasingly clear to UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations that peace and development in post-conflict situations cannot be achieved solely by initiating modest, short-term projects for vulnerable groups. Nor can such projects address the structural problems that often give rise to conflicts in the first place. Efforts to achieve sustainable reintegration in the region continue to this day, and the lasting impact of the CIREFCA process remains evident in the strength and effectiveness of community groups and local NGOs throughout Central America. The success of the innovative quick impact projects led to them being subsequently put into practice in Cambodia, Mozambique and other returnee situations.

©UNHCR/M.Echandi, 2002

Former Guatemalan refugees in Mexico receive land titles in a ceremony in Maya Balam, Quintana Roo.

State of the World's Refugees, 2000; UNHCR Global Report 2002

THE NAMIBIAN REPATRIATION

The background

Namibia's independence in 1990 was directly related to the end of apartheid in South Africa and of the Cold War. Formerly South West Africa, it has been controlled by South Africa since the end of the First World War. In 1966, the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) began an armed struggle for independence. In 1978 a UN resolution, linked to finding a solution to the civil war in neighbouring Angola, called for the territory's independence following UN-monitored elections. Ten years later, South Africa, Angola and Cuba finally agreed to implement the resolution and withdraw the Cuban troops who had been involved in the civil war in Angola.

From the start, the UN considered that the return and peaceful reintegration of the Namibian refugees was a prerequisite for elections and for the successful transformation of Namibia into an independent, democratic country, and in less than a year, over 43,000 Namibians returned home from Zambia, Angola and other countries.

UNHCR's role

UNHCR first had to hold long and difficult negotiations with South Africa to secure an amnesty for all returnees. They were then transported by air and via three land entry points, and taken to five new reception centres, where they were registered and given food, clothing, health care and basic household necessities. Finally they were transported to their home destinations, primarily in the north of the country.

By deciding to use expensive air transport to make up for the lengthy delays (for which it was criticized), UNHCR did achieve the goal of safely repatriating almost all the refugees in time for the elections and the subsequent creation of Namibia's first independent government. Some had received advanced education while abroad, and they brought back with them a variety of professional skills which eventually helped to build a stable and modestly prosperous new nation.

Lessons learned

In this case UNHCR limited its assistance to immediate food and material needs, and withdrew most of its staff after the returning refugees had been accompanied to their destinations and amnesty issues had been resolved. However, one year later a UN-led mission found that the returnees encountered serious difficulties in achieving economic integration: they could not easily find jobs nor become self reliant. The mission recommended that assistance be made available, but donors were reluctant and few projects were put in place. Although the operation was ultimately successful, perhaps the withdrawal occurred too soon, and in subsequent repatriation operations UNHCR's involvement in assisting the reintegration of the returnees was to be much greater.

Source: State of the World's Refugees

THE CAMBODIAN REPATRIATION

©UNHCR/J.Bleibtreu, 1993

A northern transit center for returning Cambodians.

The 1991 Cambodian peace accords were good example of the dramatic shift in geopolitics that followed the end of the Cold War. Vietnamese forces withdrew as Soviet assistance to Viet Nam dried up. Regional leaders sought an end to conflict, and the four armed factions involved in the Cambodian fighting agreed to cooperate. The Paris Peace Agreements of October 1991 agreed to give the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) responsibility for overseeing Cambodia's transition to democracy. UNTAC faced enormous challenges. After 22 years of war, the country's infrastructure had been all but completely destroyed. Most of the people with the skills needed to rebuild the country had either been killed or had fled.

Repatriation as part of the peace plan

It was agreed that the refugees' return was essential to the success of the peace agreements and the impending national elections. UNHCR had already been in Cambodia helping to resettle spontaneous returnees well before the arrival of UNTAC, and had opened an office in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, as far back as 1980. In 1989, as the political situation started to improve, UNHCR had started planning for repatriation. Following the precedent set in Namibia, the peace agreements anticipated that the refugees would return to Cambodia from the camps on the Thai border in time to participate in the national elections in May 1993.

In fact the repatriation took place much more quickly than had been expected. Repatriation routes, reception centres and resettlement areas were established, though at first the work had to be carried out on an ad hoc and emergency basis with whatever resources were available. But UNHCR's presence in the country before the peace accords enabled it to play an important role during this initial period.

Mud and mines

Between March 1992 and April 1993, more than 360,000 refugees returned to Cambodia, the overwhelming majority from Thailand. The operation was a logistically complicated and costly one, given the devastated infrastructure, the absence of reliable data about conditions in the countryside, continuing distrust among the different political factions, and frequent ceasefire violations. In addition, the monsoon rains transformed many of the roads used in the repatriation operation into mud baths.

A particular problem concerned the huge number of land mines and unexploded ordnance in the country. De-mining and mine awareness operations were slow to be set up and landmines remained a constant threat. As one UNHCR representative said: "The only de-mining going on is when people tread on them." Indeed, even when the de-mining operations got under way, there was evidence that mines were being laid faster than they were being removed.

>> Click on map for printable pdf version <<

By the May 1993 elections around 15,000 mines and other unexploded ordnance had been cleared, out of over eight million mines estimated to be scattered around the country.

Another problem was that some of the border camps were still under the control of the Khmer Rouge, and UNHCR had difficulty monitoring the situation of returnees in the zones controlled by them. Guarantees were sought from the Cambodian authorities that they would not carry out reprisals against people returning from camps known to have been used as bases for attacks on government forces; as it turned out there were few incidents of harassment of returnees.

Quick-impact projects

From June 1992, UNHCR began to implement a number of quick impact projects, and by the end of 1994 had provided US$9.5 million for around 80 projects, including the repair of roads, bridges, hospitals, dispensaries and schools. But these community-based projects proved far more difficult to put into operation than in Central America, as local NGOs in Cambodia were far less developed and there were only minimal local administrative and social structures in place.

Access to land

Initially, the refugees in the Thai camps were told that they could select destinations in rural areas, and that they would receive two hectares of arable land. But initial assessments of available land proved unreliable, not least because of the large number of landmines. UNHCR eventually concluded that there was simply not enough suitable land in the country for its plan to be viable, so the returnees were presented instead with several new options: they could receive agricultural land but not necessarily in their area of choice, or get a cash grant and other material assistance. In the end, about 85 per cent of Cambodian families chose the cash grant, a food allocation and a household/ agricultural kit. Instead of flocking to the cities, as had been feared, most of those opting for cash settled with surviving relatives, largely in rural areas.

Failure to disarm

Although virtually all of the refugees were repatriated before the elections of 1993, the UN failed to achieve one of its principal objectives: the disarming and demobilization of the military factions. The Khmer Rouge, which had led the genocidal regime of the 1970s, withdrew from the demobilization agreements and remained in armed strongholds. Sporadic fighting between government forces and the Khmer Rouge took place throughout the period of UNTAC's presence in Cambodia, resulting in the renewed displacement of several thousand people, many of whom were recent returnees. Despite this, the May 1993 elections were remarkably free of violence, and UNHCR began scaling down its operations soon after.

More recently, UNHCR has been compelled for security reasons to withdraw from a tripartite agreement with Cambodia and Viet Nam concerning the Montagnard refugees, although in 2003 the Cambodian authorities eventually permitted some 900 of them to resettle in the US.

State of the Word's Refugees
Global report 2002

THE MOZAMBICAN REPATRIATION

©UNHCR/T.Bolstad, 1993

Two recently repatriated sisters in Mozambique build a new house and a new life in Villa Nova, Tete Provence

Background

In 1975, following several years of armed rebellion against Portuguese rule, Mozambican independence was finally achieved. But fighting soon flared up again, this time between the governing Frelimo faction and the opposition Renamo forces. But a severe drought that began in 1992 made it impossible for the two sides to continue to support their armies, and eventually it was poverty that finally drove the parties to the negotiating table. A Peace Agreement was signed in October 1992, bringing to an end more than three decades of armed conflict in Mozambique, and triggering a large-scale return of refugees to that country. Much of the infrastructure had by that time been destroyed, and more than a third of the population had been uprooted at least once. Over 1.7 million people had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, and some four million had been internally displaced.

Repatriation from six countries

The repatriation operation was implemented in six countries where 1.7 million Mozambican refugees were hosted. Malawi alone had accommodated some 1.3 million since early the 1980s while some 400,000 lived in South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

As in Central America, the refugees began repatriating spontaneously even before the peace agreement was signed, especially from Malawi, where most refugees had easy access to their country from the camps. The vast majority of the refugees returned to Mozambique well before the elections which were held in October 1994.

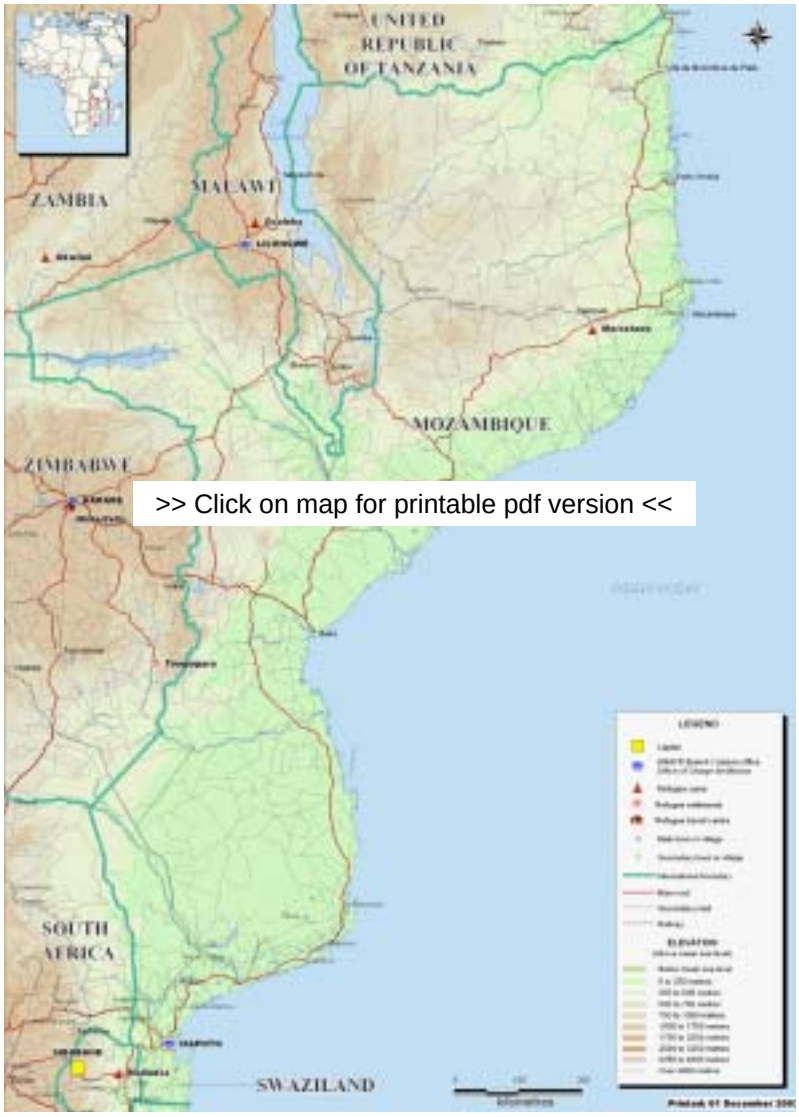
Repatriation, reconciliation and reconstruction

The reintegration programmes carried out by UNHCR and other international agencies were even more ambitious than those in Central America and Cambodia, and around US$100 million was spent. Unlike Cambodia, almost all fighting ended after the peace accords were signed, and ultimately the cooperation of all parties was secured. Demobilization was relatively smooth, and only few security incidents were reported, even where supporters of both sides had settled. The peace agreement provided for a general amnesty and did not seek to punish war crimes committed against the civilian population. Communities employed their own traditional means to seek justice and reconciliation.

Inter-agency cooperation
UNHCR, UNDP and the World Bank worked closely together to design and implement complementary programmes. UNHCR also collaborated with UN mine clearance operations but, because of slow progress, the agency had to shift its focus to promoting mine awareness. International organizations, including UNHCR, assisted with the repair and rehabilitation of schools, clinics, wells, roads and other infrastructure throughout the country. More than 1,500 quick impact projects were initiated which, as they had in Central America, further helped to stabilize and strengthen communities that had been torn apart during the war.

©UNHCR /N. Behring-Chisholm

Finding durable solutions through peace-building
During the 1990s, it became increasingly clear that the prevention of renewed fighting and further refugee flight depended largely on efforts to create durable peace. To this end, in the few years between Namibia in 1989 and Mozambique in 1993–94, UNHCR's role in repatriation operations changed profoundly.



Previously the main purpose of the organization's involvement was to ensure that refugees returned safely. But the repatriation operations in Central America, Cambodia and Mozambique involved a new and broader approach, in which UNHCR began to play a major role in UN peace-building operations. Humanitarian activities were integrated into a wider strategic and political framework aimed at ensuring reconciliation, reintegration and reconstruction.

It is clear that these efforts need to be sustained over time if they are to be effective in helping societies overcome the animosities, trauma and despair engendered by years of war and exile. But achieving these goals requires major funding, and in recent years it has been difficult to gain the needed donors' support, especially in countries of lesser strategic importance or whose problems have been overshadowed by more recent crises.

State of the World's Refugees

THE BALKANS

A HISTORY OF VIOLENT NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC HATRED.

In June 1991, Slovenia and Croatia both declared independence from Yugoslavia, starting the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Fighting first broke out in Slovenia, but was limited and lasted only a few days. The first major outbreak of violence occurred in Croatia, which had a minority population of over half a million Serbs. Following Croatia's declaration of independence, the Yugoslav army and Serb paramilitaries rapidly seized control of a third of its territory. At first, thousands of Croats were expelled from areas which fell under Serb control. Subsequently, thousands of Serbs were forced from their homes by Croatian forces. Then in 1992, the war spread to neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, with even more devastating consequences.

When Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence in March 1992, the government of Serbia, led by President Slobodan Milosevic, vowed to fight on behalf of the Serb minority population living there. By the end of April 1992, 95 per cent of the Muslim and Croat populations in the major towns and cities of eastern Bosnia had been forced from their homes, and Sarajevo was under daily bombing. By mid-June, Serb forces controlled two-thirds of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and approximately one million people had fled their homes. Bosnian Croat forces, backed by Croatia, attempted to create an ethnically pure swathe of territory adjoining Croatia. By the time the war ended in December 1995, over half the 4.4 million people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were displaced. 700,000 had become refugees in Western Europe.

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Bosnian refugees in the UN Protected Area West in Croatia.

The humanitarian 'fig leaf'

In October 1991, in the midst of the population displacement taking place in Croatia, the Yugoslav authorities requested UNHCR's assistance. UNHCR set up relief operations in all the republics of the former Yugoslavia, but the organization faced its greatest challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In May 1992, UNHCR began delivering thousands of tons of relief supplies by air to Sarajevo, and by road to destinations throughout the country. Unable to agree on how to end the conflict, the international community focused much of its energy on supporting the humanitarian relief operation led by UNHCR. Governments offered large amounts of funding for the relief operation, but were able to find a consensus on little else. The humanitarian operation increasingly became a 'fig leaf', and the only visible response of the international community to the war.

Confronting 'ethnic cleansing'

While UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations were able to deliver large quantities of humanitarian supplies during the war, they were much less successful in protecting civilians from 'ethnic cleansing'. On the whole, UNHCR was powerless to prevent the killings, beatings, rapes, detentions, expulsions and evictions of civilians. In many situations, the most UNHCR personnel could do was to report the atrocities they witnessed. UNHCR resisted evacuating civilians, but as it became apparent that the alternative for many was detention camps where they were often beaten, raped, tortured or killed, the organization began evacuating civilians whose lives were under threat. Such evacuations, however, led to an outpouring of criticism that UNHCR was facilitating 'ethnic cleansing'. UNHCR urged states in the region, and in Western Europe, to grant 'temporary protection' to the substantial numbers of people escaping from the escalating war in the former Yugoslavia.

The creation of 'safe areas'

At the beginning of 1993, a critical situation developed in eastern Bosnia which, except for three small pockets of territory around Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde, had largely been emptied of non-Serbs.

These enclaves were crowded with Muslims, many of whom had fled there from the surrounding countryside. They were defended by poorly armed Bosnian government soldiers and encircled by Bosnian Serb forces. On 2 April 1993, High Commissioner Ogata wrote to the UN Secretary-General stressing the need for 'more drastic action' to ensure the survival of the population in Srebrenica. She urged that UNPROFOR peacekeepers be permitted to use force to protect the population of Srebrenica, or that UNHCR be permitted to organize a mass evacuation. After Bosnian Serb shelling had killed 56 people during a UNHCR-organized evacuation from Srebrenica, the Security Council adopted Resolution 819, declaring the enclave to be a UN-protected 'safe area' and, among other things, calling on UNPROFOR to increase its presence there. Resolution 824, also declared Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde and Bihac to be safe areas.

Safe areas: too little, too late

The safe areas were established without the consent of the parties to the conflict and without the provision of any credible military deterrent. Governments were not willing to provide this number of troops and the Security Council therefore adopted an alternative 'light option' in which only 7,500 peacekeepers were to be deployed for this task. UNPROFOR troops were permitted to use force only in self-defence, and not in defence of the civilians they had been sent to protect. Safe areas were in fact 'neither protected areas nor safe havens in the sense of international humanitarian law, nor safe areas in any militarily meaningful sense'.

On 11 July 1995, the Bosnian Serb army overran Srebrenica, taking hundreds of Dutch peace-keepers hostage and forcing some 40,000 people to flee. Meanwhile some 7,000 people, virtually all of them men or boys and almost all Muslims, were killed by Bosnian Serb forces in the largest massacre in Europe since the Second World War. Days after the fall of Srebrenica, Serb forces overran Zepa, another so-called safe area.

Operation Storm

In early 1995, there was a new wave of 'ethnic cleansing' by the Bosnian Serbs in western Bosnia, particularly in the Banja Luka area. Then, in mid-1995, a number of events dramatically changed the dynamics of the war. In early August, the Croatian army launched 'Operation Storm', a massive military offensive involving more than 100,000 troops, which overran all Serb-controlled areas. Then, on 28 August 1995, Bosnian Serb forces fired a shell into a busy market place in Sarajevo, killing 37 people and injuring dozens more. NATO responded by launching a two-week intensive air campaign against Bosnian Serb targets. Croatian and Bosnian government forces mounted a joint offensive in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Aware that they were losing territory by the day, Bosnian Serb officials accepted a ceasefire, and agreed to attend peace talks in Dayton, Ohio.

The Dayton Peace Agreement

The Dayton Peace Agreement which resulted from these talks was signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. Although the agreement keeps Bosnia and Herzegovina united as a single state, it recognizes two entities: Republika Srpska and the Muslim–Croat Federation. The peace agreement stated that 'all refugees and displaced persons have the right to return freely to their homes of origin', though it made no provisions to enforce such returns. Instead it relied on the former parties to the conflict voluntarily to create an environment in which refugees could return 'in safety, without risk of harassment, intimidation, persecution, or discrimination'.

"Material safety includes access to basic services. Legal safety includes the redress of human rights violations, non-discrimination, and unhindered access to justice."

Ron Redmond

On the civilian side, however, the agreement left the nationalist leaders in power on both sides, undermining, among other things, prospects for reconciliation among the different ethnic groups and the possibility for displaced people and refugees to return to the areas from which they were 'ethnically cleansed' during the war. The lack of public order in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and particularly the lack of effective security for ethnic minorities, prevented any significant reversal of the 'ethnic cleansing' which took place during the war. Local political leaders on both sides repeatedly blocked returns by relocating members of their own ethnic group into available housing space and creating a climate of fear and intimidation for minorities. Most of them relocated to new areas where their own ethnic group was in the majority.

At the end of 1999, some 800,000 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina remained displaced and unable to return to their former homes. UNHCR has set up a number of bus lines travelling between the two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and has facilitated group visits of refugees and displaced people to places of origin.

Open Cities project

Another UNHCR initiative was to set up the 'Open Cities' project, whereby donors were encouraged to invest in cities which allowed minority groups to return. Though small numbers of people have returned to areas, where they now form part of an ethnic minority, there has as yet been minimal progress in rebuilding genuinely multi-ethnic societies in either Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Commitment to peace-building
UNHCR has consistently emphasised that for the return process to be sustained the international community must continue to commit considerable resources to building peace in the region. In a demonstration of its own commitment to the process, UNHCR has been cooperating closely with the main players in the region, including the UN International Police Force, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the World Bank and other local and international organizations. Nonetheless, the process of ethnic separation, which began during the war, continued by other means in the post-war period.

Kosovo, Serbia and Milosevic
In 1998, nine years after Kosovo had lost its status of autonomy within Yugoslavia, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) supported by the ethnic Albanian majority, openly rebelled against Serbian rule. Though sympathetic with their desire for greater freedom, the international community opposed their demand for independence, and pressured Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic to end the escalating violence in the province – violence that had already resulted in an estimated 260,000 displaced people within Kosovo, 79,000 more Kosovo Albanian refugees and displaced persons in the immediate region, and over 100,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Western Europe and further afield.

Genocide and deportations
Local fighting between the KLA and Yugoslav forces continued, while Yugoslav armed forces and police, as well as paramilitary forces and local Serbs, carried out a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing, which included organized mass deportations to neighbouring states. Thousands of Kosovo Albanians were killed and about 800,000 fled or were expelled from Kosovo. Of these, 426,000 fled to Albania, 228,000 to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and some 45,000 to Montenegro.

Return to chaos and danger
In June, Yugoslavia accepted a peace plan, which required the withdrawal of all Serb forces and the return of refugees and displaced person. The refugees started returning immediately. Within three weeks, 500,000 people had returned and, by the end of the year, more than 820,000 Kosovo Albanians had returned. But they came back to a society without a functioning civil administration, police force or any legal or judicial system and massive destruction of property.

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Destruction in the UN protected area of Vukovar in Croatia.

Returnees also faced danger from landmines, booby traps, and unexploded ordnance. With tens of thousands of homes destroyed or badly damaged in Kosovo, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations immediately set up a large-scale rehabilitation programme.

Reverse ethnic cleansing

Apart from the enormity of the reconstruction task, however, the greatest challenge proved to be that of protecting the remaining Serbs, Roma and other minorities in Kosovo. As they flooded back, Kosovo Albanians attacked and intimidated Serbs and other minority groups suspected of perpetrating atrocities against them. Within three months, up to 200,000 Serbs and other minorities left Kosovo in a process dubbed "reverse ethnic cleansing". The province soon became deeply divided between ethnic Albanian areas and pockets of territory still inhabited by Serbs and Roma. UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations carried out a number of activities aimed at protecting and assisting Serbs and other minorities.

Meanwhile, the flight of Kosovo Serbs to other parts of Yugoslavia put a further strain on a country already suffering from the prolonged effects of international sanctions and aerial bombardment. Even before this latest influx, the country was hosting over 500,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in the region at that time.

"Emergency relief operations should not be treated as a substitute for timely and firm political action to address the root causes of conflict"

Kofi Annan

The fall of Milosevic

Relations between Serbia and the only other remaining Yugoslav republic, Montenegro, hit rock bottom as its leaders distanced themselves from Milosevic's handling of Kosovo. Inevitably, after 83 years of existence, Yugoslavia disappeared from the map of Europe, replaced by a looser union called simply Serbia and Montenegro.

Milosevic refused to accept his defeat in the presidential election of 2000, but was forced out of office by strikes, massive street protests and the storming of parliament. He was handed over to the UN War crimes Tribunal in The Hague and is on trial for crimes against humanity and genocide. Kosovo itself became a UN protectorate, though some powers are being handed back to elected local authorities. One of the main problems in the province is getting Serbs, who fled as Yugoslav security forces withdrew in 1999, to return to their homes.

The guns are silent. But the tensions remain

Ethnic tension in the region remains just below the surface: conflict between Serbs and ethnic Albanians threatened to erupt in late 2000 on the Serbian side of the Kosovo border; and a major outbreak of inter-ethnic violence occurred in Macedonia in 2001, again involving the Albanian minority, which was contained by NATO peacekeepers and resolved by political means. Another serious flare-up occurred as recently as March 2004, requiring a large increase in UN forces to control the situation.

Though considerable progress has been made to heal the wounds of the violent 1990s, major problems remain. An estimated 2.2 million civilians went home after the guns fell silent, and an increasing number continue to return to minority areas where they live uneasily among their former enemies, including 400,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But today more than a million people remain displaced, most of them living in Serbia.

Important lessons were learned in the decade of conflict in the Balkans concerning the use of military forces to protect civilian victims of war. In a highly critical report to the UN General Assembly on the fall of Srebrenica, submitted in November 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan summed up the most significant of these:

"The cardinal lesson of Srebrenica is that a deliberate and systematic attempt to terrorize, expel or murder an entire people must be met decisively with all necessary means, and with the political will to carry the policy through to its logical conclusion. In the Balkans, this lesson had to be learned not once, but twice. In both instances, in Bosnia and in Kosovo, the international community tried to reach a negotiated settlement with an unscrupulous and murderous regime. In both instances it required the use of force to bring a halt to the planned and systematic killing and expulsion of civilians."

All too often during the 1990s, humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR were left to deal with problems which were essentially political in nature. In each case, the limits of humanitarian action were clearly demonstrated. As the then UN High Commissioner for Refugees emphasised with growing insistence throughout the decade, emergency relief operations should not be treated as a substitute for timely and firm political action to address the root causes of conflict.

BBC News
State of the World Refugees, 2000
Helping Refugees, 2003

RWANDA: A LONG HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

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Rwandan returnees

Rwanda has been the epicentre of regional violence since gaining independence in 1962. The roots of this violence, though, go back to the early years of colonial rule, when in the aftermath of the First World War the Belgian authorities ignored the tribal status quo and gave the Tutsi minority control power over the Hutu majority. But in the late 50s, just before granting Rwanda independence, the Belgians switched their support to the Hutus, who promptly overthrew the Tutsi monarchy. The ensuing rioting caused the first of many refugee flights into neighbouring countries, thus creating enormous tension and unrest in the region that continues to this day.

> ***"We yearn for the day when people in every part of the world can live safely within their own country and community"***
>
> **Sadako Ogata**

Genocide

The Hutus remained in control until the late 80s, when some hard-line Tutsi exiles began to plan a military comeback and, as the Rwandan Patriotic Forces (RPF), attacked the government in 1990. An uneasy power-sharing truce was established in 1993, but following the suspicious deaths of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in a plane crash, Hutu extremists rose up and massacred almost a million Tutsis and Hutu moderates. The RPF gained power, and this time it was the Hutu's turn to flee, with 2 million of them occupying camps in the same neighbouring countries to which they had driven the Tutsis 30 years before.

Militarization of the refugee camps

The large refugee camps bordering Rwanda, notably those in Goma, Zaire, became the main base of the defeated Rwandan Army and its Hutu militia allies, who formed a virtual government in exile. This made the refugee occupants political hostages, and created almost impossible conditions for UNHCR. By now more than half of Rwanda's population of 7 million were either refugees or internally displaced. The presence of so many refugees in camps so close to the border amounted to a proxy military force that threatened the Rwandan government, which responded by forcibly clearing out many of them. About 1.4 million refugees returned to Rwanda as the camps were simply dismantled or destroyed, and some 200,000 people are estimated to have perished or executed during the operation.

The whole region aflame

The situation could not have been more volatile, and in 1996 the inevitable explosion happened, first in Zaire. After two years of insecurity, military operations and alliances in East Zaire an armed rebellion led to the overthrow of President Mobutu Sese Seko and his replacement in 1997 by Laurence Kabila.

This in turn led to the spread of conflict throughout the region, centred on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its riches, and involving the armies of six countries, some of whom supported Kabila, while others sought his downfall. The number of freshly displaced persons that resulted reached more than one million by the end of 1999.

The Imidugudu Policy

Meanwhile, in 1996-97 Rwanda was experiencing massive influx of 1.4 million returnees, who were desperately in need of shelter and reintegration assistance. These were in addition to about 800,000 "old case" returnees who had fled the 1959 pre-independence riots. In January 1997 the government enacted its Imidugudu policy, which stated that people must be grouped together in villages, rather than in their traditionally scattered habitats, for safety and in order to provide necessary services more easily.

In 1998, security concerns again triggered a military operation, this time in the Northwest of the country, creating more instability on both sides of Rwanda's borders. Some 700,000 people were forcibly displaced in an attempt to restore internal security. They were told to regroup in Imidugudu villages, but the donor community refused to fund their reinstallation.

Stability at last

By the end of 1999, a degree of stability had been achieved within Rwanda's national borders. But regional conflicts in Eastern DRC and Burundi remained potential threats to the country's internal stability. 2003 saw the country adopt a new constitution and hold its first presidential elections since 1994. These were followed by legislative elections, marking the end of a nine-year transition period in Rwandan politics. Also in 2003, UNHCR facilitated the signing of tripartite agreements for the voluntary repatriation of refugees between Rwanda and Zambia, Uganda and DRC. In 2004 UNHCR also hopes to facilitate the return of some 32,000 Congolese refugees who are now in Rwanda.

But the situation is still far from perfect, and for Rwandan returnees, it is of crucial importance that reintegration assistance continues. Most of them face a situation of near destitution on their return, and the personal and institutional support networks from before the 1994 genocide now no longer exist.

Lessons learned

The failure to halt the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the failure to prevent the militarization of the refugee camps at Goma in 1994–96, and the failure to monitor effectively the dispersal of the Rwandan Hutu refugees driven into Zaire and to protect and assist them, all have shown that if civil conflict and forced human displacement are not addressed promptly, the longer-term consequences can be catastrophic.

The April 1994 genocide was the defining moment in the recent history of the region. It could have been prevented, and the fact that it occurred was the culmination of decades of missed opportunities.

RLSS Mission Report 2000/03 Geneva; External Evaluation of the UNHCR Shelter Program in Rwanda 1994 –1999
State of the World's Refugees, 2000
UNHCR Global Appeal, 2004

AFGHANISTAN

©UNHCR/P.Benatar, 2002

Afghan refugees prepare for the trip home, Takhta Baig center, Peshawar.

1979-2000 – The Refugee Years
In December 1979, the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan. Its aim: to support the communist regime that had come to power the previous year. The result: a bitter ten-year conflict between the Afghan government and its superpower ally on the one side, and the Afghan mujahedin and their various Western and Islamic backers on the other. And the launch of a cycle of refugee exodus and return.

When the Soviets withdrew across the Amu Darya River in 1988, war was expected to come to an end. It did not. The mujahedin continued to fight against the government, which finally fell in 1992. An interim government made up of the main mujahedin factions was formed in Pakistan. Almost instantly, the different faction leaders began to fight for power. Alliances were made, broken, and reforged. And the fighting raged on, causing immeasurable suffering.

In late 1994, an unexpectedly powerful new force, the Taliban, appeared, led by the reclusive Mullah Omar. From their Kandahar stronghold, the Taliban moved out to take Herat, Jalalabad, and, by the end of 1996, the capital city, Kabul. With the capture of Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, they controlled more than 80 per cent of the country. Against this turbulent backdrop, millions of Afghans left their homes, seeking refuge both within Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries (notably Pakistan and Iran) and further afield – in India, Russia, Europe, North America and Australia.

By the end of 1980, a year after the Soviet invasion, 1.9 million refugees had already crossed into Pakistan and Iran, a figure that eventually rose to over six million, split between the two countries.

For much of the 1980s, Afghan refugees provided almost half the world's refugee total. UNHCR alone spent more than 1.6 billion on assisting them. In 1989, when the last Soviet soldiers left the country, some refugees began to return to quieter parts of Afghanistan, despite the fighting between the government and mujahedin groups.

In 1992, when the victorious mujahedin entered the capital, 1.6 million Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran in the space of eight months – many with assistance from UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The initial euphoria quickly dissipated after the mujahedin groups turned on each other in an increasingly bitter power struggle. Although many Afghans repatriated in the 1990s, others left the country, forced out by the conflict, deteriorating economic conditions, and, in the final years, a devastating drought. Many entered camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) or joined IDP communities squatting in disused public buildings.

By the end of the decade, refugee populations in Iran and Pakistan had risen again to more than five million, and Afghans still made up UNHCR's biggest caseload.

2001 onward:
Repatriation and Reintegration
Suddenly, in the autumn of 2001, attention began to refocus on Afghanistan. Following the Coalition intervention, and the Taliban's departure from the main cities, refugees and IDPs immediately started to go back to their homes. By early December 2001, more than 10,000 Afghans had moved back to the capital – some from Pakistan, others from locations within the country.

UNHCR staff throughout the region began to work with government counterparts in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan on a multi-year strategy for the voluntary repatriation and initial reintegration of Afghan refugees. Tripartite voluntary repatriation agreements were negotiated with the governments of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. These serve as an important legal framework for the repatriation process. Similar agreements have been signed by UNHCR and Afghanistan with the Governments of France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

One of the largest repatriation operations in history

Since the end of 2001, Afghanistan has been the scene of one of the largest assisted voluntary repatriation operations in recent history, with some 3 million displaced people returning to their homes. At the same time, a new, internationally recognized transitional Government has been striving to establish control over the entire country and to attract foreign investment for reconstruction and development.

In 2002, the operation was essentially an emergency one, in which UNHCR and its government partners, other UN agencies and NGOs assisted the return of some two million refugees and IDPs and provided hundreds of thousands of people with housing and clean water.

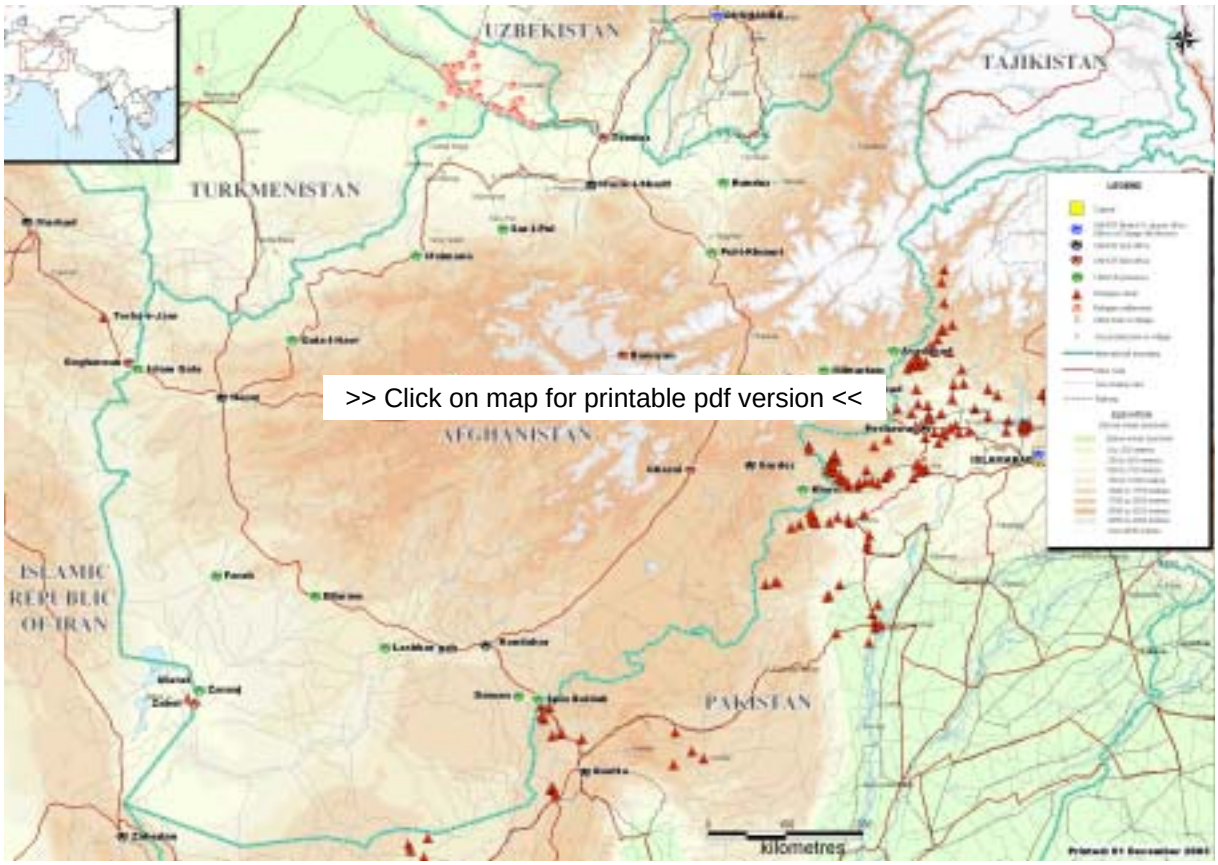
Working with the government

In 2003, UNHCR placed more emphasis on building government capacity (at national and provincial levels) and linking up with a range of other assistance and development organizations, strengthening efforts to ensure longer-term reintegration of returnees. The organization's budget, like those of other UN agencies operating in Afghanistan, was included in the Transitional Administration's National Development Budget. Its programmes are aligned with national priorities and policies, and activities are coordinated through a Consultative Group made up of representatives from the Government, donors, and organizations involved in assistance and development.

A transitional year

The year 2004 is a transitional one, in which UNHCR will shift its focus towards the longer term and highlighting the need to look for alternative approaches to the Afghan displacement issue for the future. Government capacity building will continue to be a key item, in the context of what the High Commissioner has termed a "Governmentalized 4Rs programme" (repatriation, rehabilitation, reconstruction, rehabilitation). It will provide some direct shelter assistance (20,000 units are currently planned) but UNHCR is discussing the establishment of partnership agreements with other implementing organizations. Interventions in the water sector are being mostly channelled through government programmes. The office is also carrying out cash-for-work and vocational training projects, mostly related to the construction of minor infrastructure and the development or rehabilitation of small irrigation schemes.

It is concentrating on protection, coexistence, monitoring and partnerships. Returnee monitoring is a key priority, with reports being analyzed, shared with appropriate institutions, and acted upon. UNHCR proposes and pursues measures to prevent and stop human rights abuses, and provides support to efforts to establish functioning institutions and the rule of law (from the perspective of return and displacement), and to overcome obstacles to reintegration.



THE SRI LANKAN CIVIL WAR

UNHCR started working in Sri Lanka in 1987, primarily to assist in repatriating around 100,000 refugees who had fled to India to escape the then four-year old war. However, escalating fighting meant that by the end of the year an estimated 400,000 civilians had been forced from their homes.

Rebel demands for independence

Sri Lanka's civil war was sparked in 1983 when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched an ambush on a group of government soldiers, killing fourteen. The LTTE was one of a number of militant Tamil groups established amid concerns that the country's majority Sinhalese population was enacting policies designed to marginalize the Tamil minority; Sinhalese had been designated the country's sole official language in 1954 – just eight years after independence – and when the country changed its name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka in 1972, Buddhism was given primary place as the country's religion. A product of escalating tension in the late 1970s, the LTTE demanded full independence in the country's north and east for nearly three million Tamils.

As the conflict continued through the 1990s, the number of internally displaced civilians rose to more than 800,000, plus another 200,000 refugees living in Tamil Nadu in southern India. Additionally, as many as 65,000 persons have been killed during the nearly two-decade long conflict.

Peace negotiations

Intensive fighting in the north and east of the country continued until February 2002 when, after several previously failed attempts at peace, the government and Tamil Tigers signed a permanent cease-fire agreement, paving the way for talks under a new peace initiative sponsored by Norway. By removing many military checkpoints and opening up the road link to the northern city of Jaffna, the government sought to deliver benefits of peace even before formal peace talks began.

UNHCR/R.Chalasani

A returnee family in front of their galvanized frame shelter at the Thodadeli Welfare Center.

Returns

By the end of 2003, more than 345,000 IDPs had taken advantage of the improved freedom of movement to return to their homes in former areas of conflict. In addition, nearly 6,000 registered refugees returned from India in organized or spontaneous movements. Such returns are likely to continue in 2004, in numbers largely dictated by the success of the peace negotiations.

Despite the ceasefire accord and start of peace talks, refugees have had mixed feelings about returning to homes which they abandoned 10 to 20 years ago. The government and the LTTE have been keen to promote spontaneous return, and many people have been more than willing to make the journey. Others, feeling more comfortable where they are because of access to schools, jobs and other basic needs, face the challenge of becoming accepted members of the communities in which they have been displaced. By the end of 2003, more than 385,000 people remained displaced within the island.

Not-so-sweet home

Those opting to return home have themselves encountered difficulties. Many homes and buildings have been destroyed, schools have closed down and other basic infrastructure is missing. Worse, the slow removal of some 25,000 landmines in the Jaffna peninsula alone is hindering the smooth return of displaced people, and some have been encouraged to return to areas that were not yet made safe.

Who owns what?
Resettlement raises issues regarding the ownership of properties, because ownership documents have been destroyed in the war and government records are not available. Often returnees discover that other people have moved into the homes they had to abandon. In some cases, the boundaries of local authorities have been shifted during the conflict, creating more problems about ownership. Often there is inadequate compensation to rebuild damaged homes, and many of those returning also have to cope with a lack of basic utilities such as drinking water, schools and hospitals.

Rights for all
If people are to be able to return to their homes in safety and with dignity, then conditions in return areas must be adequate. Returnees should be able to live without fear, send their children to schools and earn a living. If such conditions cannot be met, and returning home is therefore not an option, then other solutions have to be found. This could mean displaced persons staying where they are and becoming members of the local community. Or, it might mean relocating and joining a community elsewhere.

This applies to returnees and displaced persons alike – including those occupying abandoned homes. When the original occupants return to find another displaced family living in their home, it is not enough to say that the illegal squatters should simply leave and find accommodation elsewhere. All displaced persons have a right to a solution.

A lasting peace?
Prospects for a peaceful settlement of Sri Lanka's 20-year conflict remain promising, and the ceasefire agreement signed in February 2002 has for the most part been respected. Close to three-quarters of a million people were displaced at the time of the February 2002 ceasefire; by the end of 2003 almost half had returned home. In addition, of 80,000 Sri Lankans living as refugees in India, almost 6,000 had made the journey home.

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UNHCR/R.Chalasani

With assistance from UNHCR, this boy's family was able to purchase goats. Income generation programs give people the opportunity to become self-sufficient.

ANGOLA

Angolan returnees in Cazombo

©UNHCR /N. Behring-Chisholm

Background

Angola is rich in resources, and exports more oil to the USA than Kuwait. Yet despite its wealth, or more correctly because of it, conflict has left much of the country in ruins. The war between the government and UNITA rebels began after independence from Portugal in 1975, and continued unabated until the rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi was killed early in 2002 and peace talks began. Now, after more than 30 years of war, the possibility of real peace has come to Angola.

But the price of peace has been heavy. The civil war displaced over four million people from their homes, about a third of Angola's population, and among them were some 450,000 refugees who sought safety in neighbouring countries. The challenge is now reconstruction and rehabilitation of these displaced people.

Returning home…to hunger

Soon after the fighting stopped, refugees began to return spontaneously from the neighbouring Congo, where some had lived in exile for as long as 25 years. Thousands of them returned on foot, via an official border crossing, while even more crossed back into Angola without reporting their departure. Other refugees returned from next-door Zambia to Angola's Moxico Province, from where they had fled in 1998 to escape the fighting. Refugees whose homes were deeper inside Angola preferred to wait for a UNHCR-sponsored repatriation, rather than rush back home.

In the final months of the civil war, the Angolan army virtually emptied the countryside of people as part of its counter-insurgency campaign. Hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted, losing their homes and their livelihoods. These returning internally displaced people increased the number relying on food assistance from 1.8 million to 2.4 million before they would harvest their first crops.

UNHCR's role

To help the refugees return and reintegrate in safety and dignity, UNHCR and its partners, as well as other aid agencies, coordinated with the Angolan government to set up schools, hospitals, sanitation and other services. Help was also given in obtaining the correct documentation, and in offering school, vocational or language education (many, after years exiled in Zambia, could speak English but not Portuguese).

After the war, there were an estimated seven million anti-tank and anti-personnel mines littering the country, so to ensure that returnees continue to resettle in areas that are safe, demining and mine awareness programmes continue to operate.

UNHCR has also been assisting returning Angolan refugees with transport and logistics, and providing them with essential relief items such as blankets, buckets, kitchen sets and soap. Nutritional and medical screenings are carried out and basic food assistance is being provided in cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP) until they may consume their own crops.

Quick Impact Projects in areas of return are helping rebuild the basic infrastructure, facilitating transport, supporting small-scale production and generating employment. HIV/AIDS awareness, environmental sanitation and hygiene interventions are given priority attention. Community development initiatives are steering communities toward self-reliance, and ensuring that assistance is provided equitably to everyone.

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Peace. But at a price

The peace settlement ended the fighting, but did not lead to an immediate improvement in the humanitarian situation. Instead it revealed the full impact of the war on the civilian population in the countryside, including 36 previously inaccessible areas containing a further half-million people in need of assistance.

Today the main challenges remain malnutrition, continuing food insecurity, a lack of clean drinking water, ina-dequate sanitation and poor health facilities. Indeed, according to UNICEF, Angola is one of the world's worst countries in which to be a child. Under-five mortality rates are the second highest in the world, with almost a third of Angolan infants dying before they reach their fifth birthday. Less than half of school-aged children receive any formal education, and only 34% of those who do attend school reach the fifth grade.

Progress

Despite these dire conditions, in 2003 the situation did improve substantially: there was a sharp fall in people needing emergency assistance; millions of children were vaccinated; and malnutrition was significantly reduced. But while much has been done to help this hungry, war-ravaged country, clearly much more is needed if it is ever to achieve its potential.

Sources: ECHO leaflet, Angola: The Challenge of Peace, Esperanza and Alfredo (Educational Kit "Young African Refugees: Building the Future") 2004 UNHCR Global Appeal

PEOPLE

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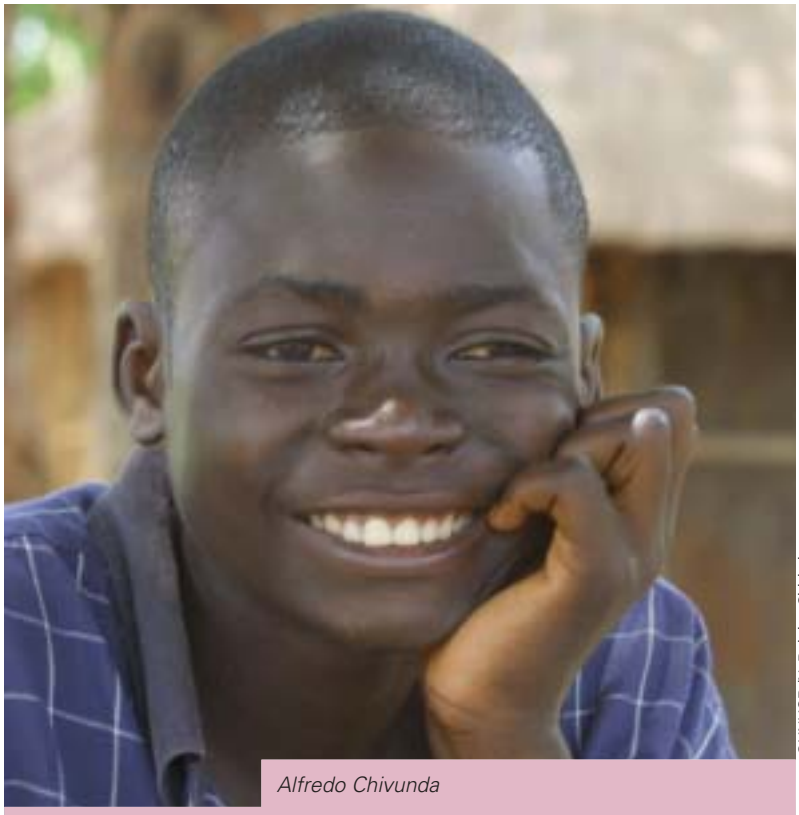
ALFREDO AND ESPERANZA.

HOPEFUL TEENAGE RETURNEES TO ANGOLA

After more than 30 years of war in Angola, the peace process which began in April 2002 opened the door to a flood of returnees – and with it the three-pronged challenge of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation.

A third of the population was displaced during the conflict, and around half a million fled the country, mainly to neighbouring Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This tells the story of two teenagers, now no longer refugees, who have experienced the final stage of the refugee experience: they have returned to their home town. Now, with the assistance of the Humanitarian Aid Office of the European Commission (ECHO), UNHCR and their partner agencies, the two have a chance to build a decent future.



Alfredo Chivunda

©UNHCR/N. Behring-Chisholm

The ravages of war

Cazombo is an Angolan town near the border with Zambia which was hard hit during Angola's decades-long civil war. After the peace pact was signed, refugees started coming home again to a country ravaged by war and littered with landmines. Despite the level of destruction, people have been flocking back to their villages, anxious to rebuild their homeland, and testing the resources of ECHO and UNHCR, who have to ensure that the refugees can return to "acceptable conditions" in yet another country emerging from war.

Two years on, the main challenges are still malnutrition, ongoing food insecurity, a lack of clean drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor health facilities. Mortality rates in Angola remain high, while malaria, anaemia, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea are the most common life-threatening illnesses. In order to hasten development, one of the more important tasks facing the country is to rapidly rebuild schools and find the teachers to staff them.

Says Marie Olsen of ECHO, "All other kinds of infrastructure also were destroyed during the war. There were no schools, there were no health posts or hospitals which were functioning. There was no water for sanitation, just some for drinking. It was very difficult for people to start a new life, because the right conditions were simply not yet in place."

Alfredo's story

Fourteen-year-old Alfredo Chivunda was born in a refugee camp in Zambia, so he has never known his country of origin, either at peace or at war. Now, for the first time in his life he has arrived in Cazombo, his ancestral home, to try to find a school here. But, too old to attend primary school, he quickly discovered that secondary schools had not yet been rebuilt. What's more, having grown up in Zambia, he doesn't speak Portuguese, the language of instruction in Angola. Alfredo is especially worried that he will lose key years at school: "The Portuguese which they do speak here will be hard for me to start learning, because it is so late. I will have to start again and that will be hard also."

"I have no friend here. My only friend is this tree. I always stay here with the tree, reading a book".

Alfredo left Zambia on his own, and now he stays in a small village, 40 minutes' walking distance from Cazombo, with his half-brother Manuel and his family. A lot older than the other children in the village, he feels lonely. "In this village there are no people to be friends with who are my size."

He indicates a typical 5-year-old height with his hands: "All of them are just this size. I have no friend here. My only friend is this tree. I always stay here with the tree, reading a book. That's all." Holding a school textbook in his hand, Alfredo continues: "I have my book for grade 8, which is Civics, one history book, and another book titled Traditional Marriages in Zambia. I like those ones!" he laughs.

When he returned, Alfredo was expecting some financial support from his half-brother. But his brother can't help him, and he is very disappointed. Pointing at the evident poverty of his surroundings, he says "Life here is as you can see. We don't have money … and my brother is complaining that 'I also have no money to help you.'"

So, instead of getting help for himself, Alfredo has to assist his brother with the cassava weeding in order to earn some money for food, clothes and other things. A major problem for him is that he made his way home to Angola from Zambia in a hurry, without any papers -- and with no documentation he can't qualify for food aid. UNHCR is trying to solve this problem for him so that he can at least get a minimum amount of aid. (ECHO and UNHCR provide some assistance in the form of a monthly maize allowance for all registered returnees, including the 20,000 Angolans who returned to Cazombo in the first year).

Esperanza

Another young returnee, Esperanza Kabiba, is also living in Cazombo, having returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo with her mother and younger brothers and sisters. Fifteen-year-old Esperanza has been a refugee twice – first in Zambia and then in Congo – living on handouts in the camps. Now she has to work hard to help her mother who is trying to establish a small business in Cazombo, producing vegetables for the local market, and she is relying on Esperanza's youth and strength.

Says Esperanza, "To cultivate plants like that, you have to pay. You have to buy the cuttings and everything. But being returnees, we have no money, so when we receive a few rations of maize we sell a little of it. You sell a little maize. You sell a few beans. That way you can make some money and pay for the cuttings." She sighs. " If you have no money you can't do much".

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Esperanza Kabiba

Angola is the most mine-infested country in the world. It is estimated that some seven million of these lethal devices are scattered across the country. They have long posed a threat to the civilian population, and with people now returning to their home areas, there has been a sharp increase in mine accidents. Few places are safe for farming. Ignoring the danger, Esperanza's family raises manioc and sweet potato. But it will take time before the crops yield results, so in the meantime Esperanza also goes to a farm an hour's walk away to buy sugar canes to sell in the market. Even though she can't read or write, like many African women she has a good head for business.

Hopes and dreams

Alfredo and Esperanza have both attended meetings for the teenagers who, like themselves, have returned to Cazombo, to discuss the problems they are facing and how to adapt to their new life in Angola – not the least of which is how to learn Portuguese. Asked what grade she is in, now that she is back home in Angola, Esperanza answers wistfully "I don't know, I have never been to school".

Education and training in Portuguese are identified as the two most pressing needs for the young: "It is better to just help us by having a school which we can learn Portuguese fast so that we can go back to school in Portuguese", says Alfredo.

Esperanza dreams of a brighter future – a future for them and for their families in the new Angola. "My dream? I just I want Angola to be developed, and I want us children to learn so that we make Angola developed."

THE ODYSSEY OF AN AFGHAN FAMILY

Private English lesson in Kabul July 14, 2002

©UNHCR/N.Behring

That terrible day in 1979 began like any other. But by nightfall it had changed Ali Mohammed's life for ever.

Although years of civil war and an invasion by Soviet troops had devastated the country, causing millions of Afghans to flee, Ali had decided to stay and take war in his stride as best he could. Every morning, the youth went into Kabul to purchase any bargain he could find—toys, cans of food, household appliances—to resell for a tiny profit on the streets of his neighbourhood.

But this morning he could not avoid war's indiscriminate destruction, and the next thing he remembers was waking in a Red Cross clinic, fighting for his life. A shell had exploded a few yards from Ali, riddling his body with shrapnel. The doctors told him his right leg had to be amputated immediately, just above the ankle. There were complications, and two months later they had to amputate again, this time above the knee. "I left the clinic crippled, but lucky to be alive," he said.

The Taliban are coming

The reputation of the Taliban as ruthless, murderous enforcers preceded them. "The Taliban are coming! The Taliban are coming!" became a familiar refrain in the alleys of the Qala-e-Shada area of Kabul where the crippled teenager lived. "We feared them very much," Ali Mohammed said. "We heard so many rumours that they were just killing everyone."

So, together with his mother and three brothers, young Ali fled to Pakistan before the Taliban captured Kabul.

Already a total of 6.2 million Afghans had escaped to Pakistan or Iran, and Ali's family settled in the Pakistani city of Peshawar as so-called urban refugees. But life remained so difficult that after only a few months he decided to run the risk of the Taliban and return to Kabul. It was a mistake which nearly cost him his life for a second time.

As a young man and a cripple, he was a natural object of suspicion and within days he was arrested.

> ***"The vast majority of the Afghan people awaken hungry, cold and sick every morning. All of us know that the international community must be prepared to sustain a reconstruction program that will take many, many years."***
>
> **Colin Powell**

"You are a traitor," Taliban interrogators accused him, as one official sat on his stump while another mercilessly beat the sole of his good leg with an iron bar. Twice more he was picked up and shaken down for money, so when he was released a third time, he rushed to a relative's house, borrowed some money and took a bus to the border. "I fled Kabul as quickly as I could," he recalls.

Ali Mohammed was a penniless refugee once more. But he was still alive, and no longer alone: Ali now had a wife, Majan, a young widow whose husband had been killed by a stray Soviet shell, and Sabara, her daughter. The family found a four square meter room in Peshawar – tiny, but it had a small kitchen and… electricity. "I remember especially the electricity," Majan said.

"We had television and listened to all kinds of music (banned under the Taliban). Life was very difficult but we were not afraid. It was peaceful."

Home. Again.

The dramatic US-led removal of the Taliban that followed the 9/11 trauma changed everything. More than two million Afghans flooded back to their homes, and Ali too started thinking about going home: "But we had established a foothold in Pakistan. We could at least survive. Would I find work in Kabul? Could we survive there? Everyone around us was going home," he continued. "Even the carpet merchant left. In the end we really had no choice."

The Ali Mohammed family were processed by UNHCR, and received a relocation package of 100 kilos of flour, two plastic sheets, female hygienic items, a kilo of soap and 65 dollars. They joined a group of fellow returnees and, clinging precariously high above their fully laden hired vehicle, they swayed their way through the high mountain passes and across scorched valleys back towards home. Kabul had changed from a dreary, tightly regulated urban backwater where the religious police held terrifying sway into an overwhelming cacophony of noise, crowds and traffic. It was also filled with hundreds of thousands of returnees, which was not good news for a second wave of refugees like Ali and his family, and he spent weeks struggling through the streets on his crutches looking for work.

There was nothing. "Maybe it was a mistake coming back here," he often said to himself. Some even returned to Pakistan. But Ali Mohammed persisted, and after several months he managed to find employment … weaving carpets again, just as the family had done in Pakistan.

No water. No electricity. No toilet. No heating.

Today they occupy the same room Ali had once lived in on the outskirts of Kabul, a tiny bare space of scarcely four square meters. It has no utilities and plastic bags flap in the windows. Against one wall is a loom on loan from a local businessman, which mother and a daughter work by hand. Ali, still troubled by his wounds and unable to lift anything heavy, does odd jobs.

School for Sabara is out of the question. "Until I can find a full-time job," he says, "we cannot afford to send her to school. We need her here to make money for the family." The future is full of uncertainties. Concerns remain among all Afghans about how long foreign aid will continue to flow. But they press on. Ali quotes an Afghan proverb: "Each time we have one good day here, we are having a good life."

For the Ali Mohammed family it means simply taking things one day at a time.

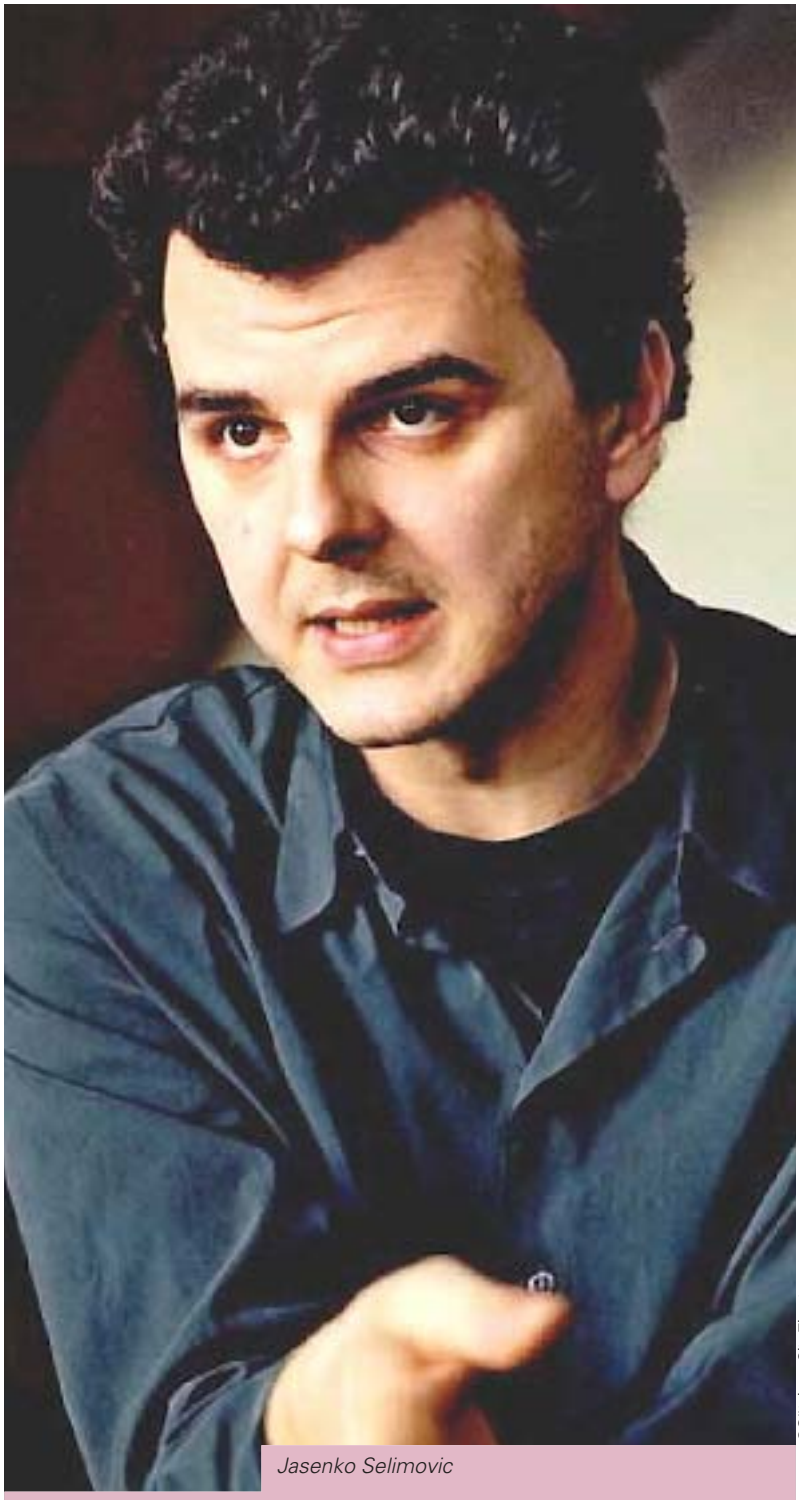
Source: Refugees Magazine

JASENKO SELIMOVIC

Ask any theatre-goer in Sweden's southern city of Gothenberg to name the Artistic Director of their City Theatre, and odds are they will immediately mention the distinctly un-Swedish name of Jasenko Selimovic. In fact this successful and talented native of the ancient city of Sarajevo, in the former Yugoslavian state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is today a proud Swedish citizen, and has held this important post since 1998. But only four short years earlier he wasn't even sure he'd manage to stay alive another 24 hours, never mind one day find himself living safely in Sweden and making an impact on that country's cultural scene.

When the Bosnian war broke out Jasenko's parents had recently made a job-related move to Sweden. On the 6th of April, 1992, he had just returned to Sarajevo after visiting them, with the intention of graduation from the Art Drama College. Jasenko was the only passenger on the flight, one of the last into Sarajevo before the siege. The war came as a total shock: "We couldn't believe that something like that could happen in our country ... that people could get assassinated because of their name or nationality."

On 5 May the shelling started, and eventually half of the town was destroyed: "One shell for each inhabitant" comments Jasenko dryly. Sarajevo became city under siege. Only the airport, which was held by the UN peacekeepers, remained open (the Serb forces "agreed" with the UN not to attack supply flights as long as no people entered or left the city via the airport).



Jasenko Selimovic

©Göteborg City Theatre

Escape!

Jasenko was determined to get out somehow, and in December he arranged with a smuggler to flee Sarajevo at night via the airport. On the day of the flight he was picked up at home and given fifteen minutes to pack.

Jasenko quickly gathered together some money, gold and underwear, but in the ensuing panic left it all in the apartment!

In the end he only brought two things with him: music by Djordje Balasevic, one of ex-Yugoslavia's the most loved performers, and *The Blooming of the Pumpkins* by A. Mihajlovic, a book about an immigrant in Sweden.

Together with several other escapees, Jasenko had to hide close to the airport until nightfall. At last it was time to make a dash for the plane. Suddenly Jasenko and another man in the group were discovered, and they started to run in the opposite direction, back towards Sarajevo. Prevented from re-entering the city, they were forced instead to walk towards the Igman mountain. The following day Jasenko managed to get a ride to the Croatian border, where he took a bus to Split, and finally a flight to Sweden … and safety.

It was Christmas, and Jasenko was struck by all the lights in the streets and windows. Throughout the long months of the siege Sarajevo was a city in darkness, and now Jasenko made his parents walk with him back and forth along one of Stockholm's brightest streets -- it gave him an enormous feeling of freedom just being able to walk in lamplight.

But on the other hand he also felt nauseated at the sheer profusion of food and merchandise; after having lived so long in a besieged, starving city, Jasenko says that he practically terrorized his whole family about this "abundance of things…."

Putting down roots

At first Jasenko was reluctant to mix with others. But friends of his parents in Stockholm helped him break out of his self-imposed isolation by making contact with a freelance theatre group. They were preparing a play by Goran Stefanovski called Sarajevo, and at first Jasenko shared his experiences from Sarajevo with the actors. Before long, he too had a part in the play. Commenting on how little things can have such a big effect, Jasenko says: "The theatre group made such a big difference for the development of my life in Sweden. Otherwise, who knows how long I would have stayed in a state of war - being apathetic. You can save lives without knowing it," he adds. "You can help other people indeed, of course you can!"

Sarajevo was performed in English, but when he and his family were granted residence permits Jasenko learnt Swedish very quickly, and already by the spring of 1994 he applied for the Art Drama College for Directors in Stockholm. In spite of tough competition he got in, and succeeded in graduating in only two years. By 1995 Jasenko had moved to Gothenburg, where he was involved in a number of plays that drew on his war experiences. In 1998, he was appointed to the post of Artistic Director of the City Theatre of Gothenburg.

For Jasenko Selimovic, it's been quite a journey from the deprivation and danger of Sarajevo under siege to a life of safety and success in Sweden.

UNHCR Stockholm

NYAMKO SABUNI

From persecution victim in Congo to Member of Parliament in Sweden

Nyamko Sabuni's father was a political activist for Patrice Lumumba, first prime minister of the former Republic of Congo (later to be called Zaire), who was assassinated in 1961. Mr. Sabuni's political convictions made him many enemies, which had a very serious effect upon Nyamko and the rest of the family, and they were subjected to a good deal of persecution themselves. Things got so bad that Nyamko, her six siblings and her mother were forced to seek safety in neighbouring Burundi, and even had to conceal their family name as a measure of caution while they were there. Back in Zaire, her father was imprisoned many times, and the family had to return there for a short while in order to support him and even to provide him with food and other necessities while in prison.

In 1980, with the help of a friend, Nyamko's father managed to escape from his Zaire prison and flee to Tanzania. The Zaire Intelligence Service soon discovered his whereabouts and attempted to assassinate him while in his hotel. Clearly, as a hunted man, he could no longer remain anywhere in Africa. But her father had the good fortune to be "adopted" by Amnesty International, and he was taken to safety in Sweden– at that time one of the countries most responsive to the crisis in the region.

On the 24th of March, 1981, only a few days before her twelfth birthday, Nyamko, her brothers and sisters, and their mother, were finally reunited with their father. Sweden was enjoying an economic boom, and jobs were relatively easy to find. Within six months, he had started what would turn out to be a lifelong career with the postal service in its international department. Her father also found the family an apartment in the Stockholm suburb of Kungsaengen and, thanks to the Swedish government, he was also able to present his family with official residency papers.

©UNHCR / K.Rodriguez

Nyamko Sabuni

To Nyamko, the greatest birthday present was simply to be with her father again. Nyamko's parents had always encouraged their seven children to study and, believing that "the children could become whatever they wanted", nothing was considered impossible. So, with the formalities settled, Nyamko eagerly started school, immediately taking an interest in athletics, basketball and dance, though as a typical teenager, not so much in politics. Not yet at least.

But not long after completing high school politics did indeed call. In 1991, with the aim of drawing greater attention to Africans' contributions to Swedish society, Nyamko became one of the founders of the African National Association in Sweden, and later, its chairperson. This in turn led her to the Swedish Liberal Party, where four years later she became a member of the board of the Party's Youth Association. Nyamko soon became a full board member of the Liberal Party in Stockholm, as well as a board member on the national level, and even an active member of Stockholm's County Cultural Commission.

In 2002 Nyamko successfully ran for the Swedish national parliament, and today she is member of a number of committees, including Industry, Foreign Trade, Regional Development, and Energy and Natural resources. She is very enthusiastic about her parliamentary duties, and travels all over Sweden meeting people and participating in debates, including ones on national television.

Some years ago Nyamko met and married a man from Dalarna, a region northwest of Stockholm, and today they are the proud parents of twin boys: Christian, and Patrice, named after her father's political hero Patrice Lumumba.

To go from being a terrified victim of the often violent politics of Central Africa, to being a democratically elected contributor to the Swedish political scene is no small feat. Nyamko's journey shows just what little outside help and a lot of determination can do. Asked if her parents, now retired, are proud of her achievement, Nyamko laughs and says "Proud, yes, but it is also what they expected from me!"

THE LONG MARCH

William Kolong Pioth

©UNHCR / B. Dennehy

William is one of thousands of Sudanese 'Lost Boys' who walked barefoot for months, eventually finding freedom and a new life of opportunity and fulfillment in a new land.

Vancouver, with its sleek buildings reaching gracefully into a pristine sky against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains and sparkling Pacific waves, is truly a city of tomorrow. Southern Sudan, on the other hand, couldn't be a starker contrast: an arid place of constant suffering and death, of gaunt, sticklike figures silhouetted endlessly in single file against huge African skies.

Trying to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two vastly different worlds is 26-year-old William Kolong Pioth.

The odyssey begins

William's unlikely journey from East Africa the western Canada began in 1983, when his parents and elders of Sudan's Dinka tribe decided that he had to be rescued from the civil war then ravaging parts of Africa's largest nation. Not yet 10 years old, William and 300 other Dinka boys embarked on a long march to safety. It took them precisely two months and 24 days to walk 1,000 kilometres to a refugee camp in neighbouring western Ethiopia.

Across the vast plains, similar armies of Sudanese 'Lost Boys' roamed the countryside, sometimes being recruited by the guerrillas as child soldiers and porters, and always searching for a place of safety. Their saga became one of the most famous stories in refugee history, a tragedy of huge proportions and at the same time a heroic tale of survival.

More long marches

In fact William was forced to undergo two further long marches. "I took my clothes off and walked naked," he remembers. "There were people killing boys just for their clothes". Eventually he reached Kakuma refugee camp, in the harsh, semi-arid northern corner of Kenya, where he learned English in a mud-walled refugee school and worked for several years as a social worker for $10 a month. One of his jobs was to help organize volleyball and basketball events in the camp, and once, following a visit by a team from the International Olympic Committee, one of the delegates sent William a pair of Nikes. They changed his life: "The day those shoes arrived," he recalls, "I was the King."

Brave new world

Soon more good fortune came William's way. The following year, he was chosen by a visiting Canadian immigration official for permanent resettlement. He was just 21 years old when he landed at Vancouver airport in the summer of 1998. It was like entering a wondrous new world in some distant galaxy. Shopping was a totally alien concept that required immediate mastery. "I didn't know where to start" he said as he recalled his bafflement when presented with a cash allowance to purchase foodstuff and basic necessities.

Having spent so much of his life in a refugee camp environment, William was used to having rations provided for him.

Indeed, so daunting was the prospect of shopping, that at first William stayed mostly indoors. Once, after successfully transacting the purchase of a chicken, the next hurdle was how to cook it. The unfamiliar-looking electric stove did not promise results, so he and his Sudanese companions ventured out to the same corner store in an unsuccessful attempt to purchase charcoal. When the settlement worker visited them the next day, William said "We're doing okay -- apart from getting charcoal for cooking".

Handling the telephone correctly took a couple of weeks, as did the TV remote control. William laughs when he relates how intimidated he was by the word power on the remote control. "I knew what the word meant because I could read, but it conveyed a scary sense like it could blow up!"

Catch 22

While resettlement agency staff helped William and another Sudanese refugee find permanent lodging, obtaining work was another matter. New arrivals often complain of the 'Canadian Experience' conundrum: you need experience to get a job – and you need a job to get experience. William set to work stocking supermarket shelves to get the 'Canadian Experience', and today he is a handyman in the building maintenance section of a large shopping mall.

Kindness

William is constantly struck by how caring Canadians are. He recounts how when he first arrived, an elderly couple in a park engaged him in conversation, interested to know where he was from. The couple called him "son" in that casual way that seniors often employ. This touched him deeply. "I really felt like I am the son of somebody!" exclaimed William, who last saw his parents when he was nine. Though his years in Canada have been the most wonderful of his life, the only thing that has marred them is not having his parents. He has tried unsuccessfully through the Red Cross to find them but "I can't tell you anything about my family," he said. "Even if my mom were sitting right here, I wouldn't recognize her."

©UNHCR / B. Dennehy

Full citizenship

In 2002, William was welcomed as a Canadian citizen. He studied hard for his citizenship exam, which all eligible permanent residents are required to pass. Shortly after the exam, he received a letter to attend a ceremony to take his oath of citizenship. William said he had difficulty grasping the concept of being a "real Canadian", and was not entirely convinced that the seemingly insignificant credit card-sized identity card entitled him to be treated as a Canadian. He decided to put it to the test by driving to the Canada-USA border. Fully prepared to be stopped and turned back, he found himself allowed to proceed through. "It was amazing that I had the same rights as other people – rights that I never thought I would ever have in my life".

Planning for the future

He insists that the most important aspect of his new life is the enduring sense of feeling protected. It is a sense of security that allows him to lead a normal life – to go to school, to have a job, to travel freely and to plan for the future. On this latter point, William marvels at the fact that at his company, he has a life insurance plan. "Canadians plan ahead" he exclaims. "In Africa you live day-by-day. I never knew anybody who had a life insurance plan back in Africa! But over here, I am 100 percent sure that I will be alive tomorrow – I am planning for things that are 25 years from now!" he enthused.

Judith Kumin, Nanda Na Champassak
Refugees Magazine

NOLVIA DOMINGUEZ SKJETNE

Dominguez Skjetne

Nolvia Dominguez Skjetne

FROM PERSECUTION IN POST-ALLENDE CHILE TO CITY COUNCIL ELECTION IN NORWAY.

In September 1973 the army Commander in Chief, General Augusto Pinochet led a military coup which ousted Salvador Allende in Chile, who in 1970 became the first Marxist in history to be elected President of a country by popular vote. As a consequence of the coup Nolvia Dominguez Skjetne, who had been active in left wing politics, was fired from her job, and her husband, who was a member of the workers' union, was executed.

In 1980 Nolvia was arrested by the Chilean intelligence service. Later she suffered health consequences due to this period of detention. Soon afterwards she decided to flee Chile with her 10-year-old son to Norway, where she was granted refugee status in November 1980. While in Norway she decided to fight against the military and defend human rights in Chile, and she also continued to support her party, the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR).

In the early part of the decade, while many asylum seekers were fleeing Chile, Nolvia became one of the leaders of the Associacion de exilados latinoamericanos en Oslo (Association of Latin American Exiles in Oslo). Her contributions included assisting a Norwegian lawyer by providing useful information about the Chilean political situation. During this period she also founded the Norwegian branch of the Committee for Defending People's Rights (CODEPU).

Before long Nolvia became active in Norwegian politics. She joined the Sosialistisk Venstreparti, the Norwegian Socialist Party, and in 1990 she became the first female immigrant to be elected at the City Council in Oslo. Focusing her attention on cultural matters, she also concerned herself with immigration issues, while also acting as a role model for other refugees and immigrants in Norway.

Although mostly engaged in Norwegian politics, Nolvia never forgot Chile, and lobbied for General Pinochet's extradition and trial.

Nolvia married a Norwegian, and today feels at home in both cultures. Her son, a successful break-dancer, moved to Denmark to pursue his career, while Nolvia herself founded and manages her own kindergarten. She served as a member for the City Council until last year, when the pressures of a family illness forced her to give up her political activities for a while – but this energetic, dedicated woman has still somehow found the time to open and manage a second day care centre. Truly Chile's loss has been Norway's gain!

Source: UNHCR Stockholm

"NO PLACE LIKE HOME."

ESPECIALLY THE SECOND TIME AROUND

A Rwandan physician's ten year journey from home … to home

Dr. Joseph Nsengiyumva can't suppress a smile: "No," he says, "there's no place like home." And he certainly should know. Because he's back from a long and harrowing journey from his home in Butare in Rwanda…to Butare. It was a journey that lasted ten long years.

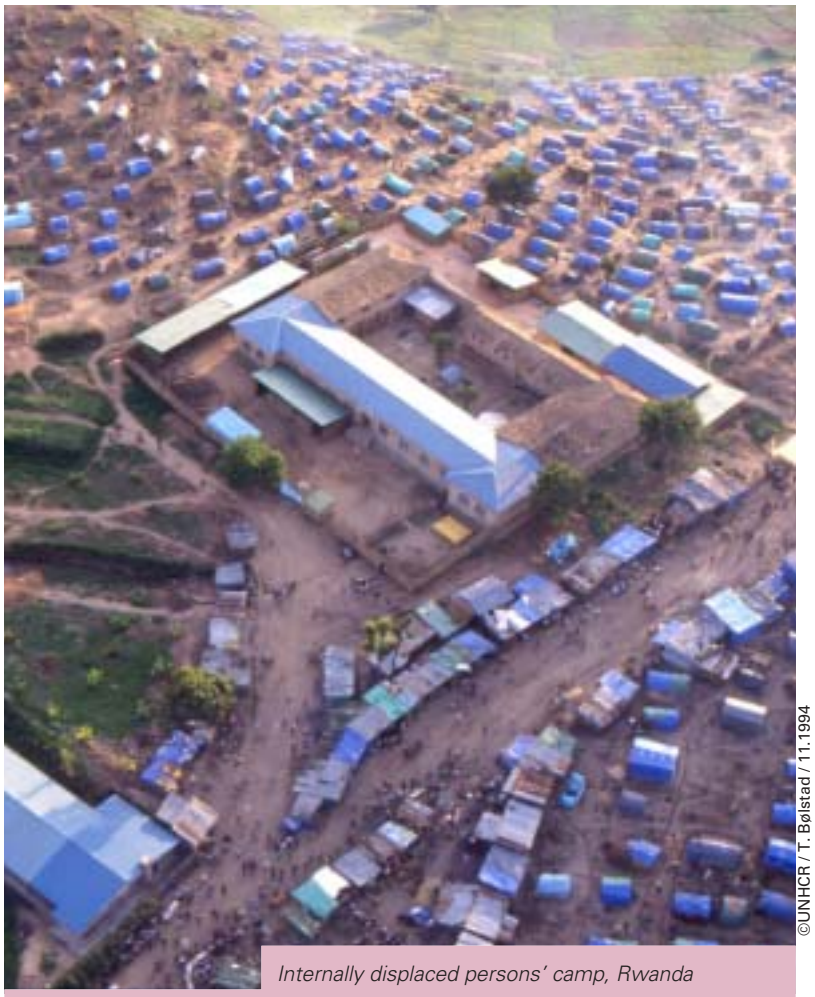
Escape from genocide

It all started back in 1994. Married and with a 2-year old daughter, Joseph Nsengiyumva was a medical student in Rwanda's university town of Butare, confidently looking forward to qualifying as a doctor. Suddenly everything came unglued as year of political turmoil culminated in genocide that left millions dead, and made millions more orphans and refugees. Joseph and his friends and family gathered a few belongings and fled towards Gikongoro, today the site of a poignant memorial to the thousands of Rwandans who were slaughtered there while seeking refuge in a school.

At that time Gikongoro was the site of a camp for IDPs, internally displaced persons. Here the family was fortunate to be fed by the Red Cross for a week before being moved on to Cyangugu, a lakeside town bordering both the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then Zaire) and Burundi. On the way the family, packed into an overcrowded minibus, had to run the gauntlet of militia roadblocks and extortion. Hungry and broke, they arrived to a scene that Joseph today sums up in one short word: panic.

"Ultimately, refugees must be helped to restart their lives, either by returning home or starting afresh in a new country"

Ruud Lubbers



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Internally displaced persons' camp, Rwanda

2 million on the move

Word was spreading that the Rwandan government had made a decision to function in exile, and was calling on citizens to go with them. This created a massive movement of two million civilians, many weighed down by the doors and windows, chickens and pots that they thought they would need. Joseph crossed the border towards the Congolese town of Bukavu, where he met a priest whom he'd known in Butare, and who offered him $40 – not much, but enough to keep his family alive.

From here a lucky few, including his sister and brother-in-law, were taken into France. "They had studied and trained in France many years earlier," remembers Joseph. "Maybe that's why they were accepted." Others were granted asylum in Belgium, Canada and the US. But not Joseph. He and his family were left to fend for themselves in Bukavu, where there was no shelter, no toilet and no potable water. Today, Lake Kivu is once again the picturesque pearl of the Great Lakes Region.

But for the fleeing refugees in 1994, its waters were used for bathing, drinking and waste disposal.

They move on again, this time to Uvira in DRC, where the exhausted family took a ferry across to Kigoma in Tanzania and on to Mpulungu in Zambia. Thinking that their chances would be better in the capital, Joseph first made his way with the family to the railhead at Kapiri Mposhi. They then took a train to Lusaka – and walked in to their first major problem: they were promptly arrested. Fortunately the police quickly understood their plight, gave them food and drink, and then took them to UNHCR. "They were kind," says Joseph. "They promised to take us to Maheba, in the North West, where there was a camp with schools and hospitals."

"We stayed on the truck for two days"

UNHCR provided a truck for the trip. But Maheba, a cold forest area with no hospital or school in sight, was hardly the paradise they hoped for: "We would have had to cut down trees just to find room for our tents!" They realized that if they stayed, they'd be forgotten, so they stubbornly refused to leave the truck. Recall Joseph, "We stayed on the truck for two days. One or two of us would leave it and cook just next to the truck. The driver couldn't make us leave, so he had to take us back to Lusaka." There they soon found themselves in a camp with refugees from Angola, Mozambique and Uganda.

They started to settle into their new life in Zambia. Most of their group were professionals who wanted to work and integrate, and their first step was to learn English. Joseph describes their Zambian hosts as very hospitable and helpful. A Catholic priest quickly helped him find his first job, and soon he was employed in the hospital pharmacy.

Medical school again

Joseph still wanted to become a doctor; he applied for a scholarship in Lusaka and six months later was accepted, even though he had to repeat a year. Finally, after years of hard study, he became Doctor Joseph Nsengiyumva, and soon he was working in the university.

©UNHCR / C. Mwangi

Dr. Joseph Nsengiyumva, Rwandan returnee.

In October 2003, hearing that Rwanda was organizing elections, Joseph, and got in touch with UNHCR in order to be repatriated. After several postponed trips, he finally moved back to Butare … back where it all began.

"They laughed when I said I was going back home."

Today he feels that everything in Rwanda has changed, positively, despite the outside media which, he believes, tends to depict Rwanda in a very negative way. Indeed, "genocide" is still synonymous with the country. But Joseph was pleasantly surprised to find that life is normal again, that people work and enjoy themselves, and there's peace and development – something that's difficult to explain to Rwandan refugees still outside the country. "They laughed at me when I said I was going back home," he chuckles.

Dr. Nsengiyumva now earns almost as much as he did in Zambia, and when asked what advice he has for Rwandan people living outside the country, he thinks for a moment and says "Coming home is not for everyone. Some people have successful businesses that they cannot abandon." He pauses. "But those in camps should come back." Even though the people in Zambia were kind and friendly, it was Refugee label that he badly wanted to shake off.

And he has. Back home again in Butare, Joseph has friends and family. He is settled and happy. He smiles again: "There really is no place like home!"

Caroline Mwangi UNHCR Rwanda

NO PAINT, NO GAIN

An Afghan artist's journey from exile to integration

Afghan artist Akbar Kurasani, a former refugee now naturalized in Ukraine, has donated to UNHCR a work drawn on his own experience, in appreciation of the refugee agency's assistance over the years.

The painting, titled Refugees, is now displayed in UNHCR's office in the Ukranian capital, Kyiv. It portrays refugees holding babies who don't want to leave; small, almost invisible roads they have to choose between; and Akbar's own road – the green one that leads to the green city of Kyiv.

Receiving the painting on Tuesday, Guy Ouellet, UNHCR's Regional Representative in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, said, "For UNHCR staff, the best reward is to see that refugees are rebuilding their lives. Our job is to give refugees the opportunity to do so, and years of lobbying and negotiations with the Ukrainian Parliament and Presidential Administration have brought practical results – refugees can now get citizenship in Ukraine and integrate in the country."

As a refugee "you feel like a yo-yo"

Akbar added, "I am very grateful to UNHCR for its protection. Nobody likes to be a refugee, you feel like a yo-yo – everybody can play with your life and you are dependent on somebody else's decision. When I became a Ukraine national, I felt much more confident and independent. I now hold my destiny in my own hands."

For the 43-year-old artist, it has been a case of 'no paint, no gain': "Art saved me from insanity, which has overtaken many of my compatriots during the endless and absurd civil war," he said, referring to decades of unrest in Afghanistan. "The place I was from is beautiful, but probably there is nothing left there. Everything is ruined after so many years of murderous war."

©UNHCR

Akbar Kurasani

Born in the mountains of Uruzgan province in central Afghanistan, Akbar discovered art when he was drafted into the army in Kabul. He attended art classes at the Soviet Union Informational and Cultural Centre, where a Moscow artist taught him to paint.

Help from UNHCR

In 1986, Akbar was sent to study art in Ukraine. But before he could finish his education, the Taliban took over Afghanistan, effectively preventing him from going home. UNHCR intervened to prevent him from getting evicted from his dormitory at the art academy, provided him with legal advice and helped promote his works through awareness-raising exhibitions.

When the Migration Service of Ukraine started the refugee status determination process in 1996, Akbar was recognized as a refugee. By now a professional artist, he continued living in his nine square metre dormitory room, sleeping beside 300 paintings -- and developing allergies to the paint fumes. Only in 2002 was he able to afford a small, separate apartment.

Naturalization

The artist became a Ukrainian citizen in July 2003 under a revised citizenship law that allows refugees to be naturalized after three years of residence in the country. As of 1 March 2004, more than 230 refugees – mostly Afghans – have benefited from this scheme since it was introduced in 2001. Over the years, Akbar has integrated into Ukrainian society and become part of its art scene, holding numerous personal exhibitions in the last five years. He also has paintings in private collections in Europe, the United States and Asia.

But his heart remains in Afghanistan. Akbar has been trying to trace his internally displaced mother and family, and hopes to go back to his homeland soon. In fact, he dreams of designing housing projects for returnees so that one day, exiles like himself will have a home to go back to.

UNHCR News Stories ©UNHCR/N.Prokopchuk

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX I: STATISTICS

PERSONS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR – BY REGION

Region	Total of Concern 1st January 2002*	Total of Concern 1st January 2003
Asia	8,820,700	9,378,900
Africa	4,152,300	4,593,200
Europe	4,855,400	4,403,900
North America	1,086,800	1,061,200
Latin America & Caribbean	765,400	1,050,300
Oceania	81,300	69,200
TOTAL	**19,761,900**	**20,556,700**

** Revised year-end figures.*

ORIGIN OF MAJOR REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN 2002
[Ten largest groups1]

Country of Origin 2	Main Countries of Asylum	Total
Afghanistan	Pakistan / Iran	2,481,000
Burundi	Tanzania /D.R. Congo	574,000
Sudan	Uganda / Ethiopia / D.R. Congo / Kenya / Central African Rep.	505,200
Angola	Zambia / D.R. Congo / Namibia / Congo	433,000
Somalia	Kenya / Yemen / Ethiopia / United Kingdom / USA / Djibouti	429,000
Democratic Rep. Congo	Tanzania / Congo / Zambia / Burundi / Rwanda	415,000
Iraq	Iran / Germany / Netherlands / Sweden	401,000
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Serbia-Montenegro / USA / Sweden / Denmark / Netherlands	372,000
Viet Nam	China / USA	348,000
Eritrea	Sudan / Ethiopia	316,000

1 More than 4 million Palestinians who are covered by a separate mandate of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are not included in this report. However, Palestinians outside the UNRWA area of operations such as those in Iraq or Libya, are considered to be of concern to UNHCR. At year-end their number was 428,710.
2 This table includes UNHCR estimates for nationalities in industrialized countries on the basis of recent refugee arrivals and asylum seeker recognition.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND TOTAL PERSONS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR WORLDWIDE1
(All figures as at 31 December of each given year)

Year	Refugees	Total population of concern
1980	8,439,000	—
1981	9,696,000	—
1982	10,300,000	—
1983	10,602,000	—
1984	10,710,000	—
1985	11,844,000	—
1986	12,614,000	—
1987	13,103,000	—
1988	14,319,000	—
1989	14,706,000	—
1990	17,370,000	—
1991	16,829,000	—
1992	17,798,500	—
1993	16,280,100	—
1994	15,703,100	—
1995	14,860,600	—
1996	13,317,400	—
1997	11,966,200	19,741,000
1998	11,429,700	19,827,700
1999	11,625,700	20,503,200
2000	12,062,500	21,800,300
2001	12,029,900	19,761,000
2002	10,389,700	20,556,700

1 Includes revised year-end figures.

PERSONS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR – BY CATEGORY

Region	Refugees	Asylum seekers	Returned refugees	Internally displaced*	Stateless and various	TOTAL 1ST JAN. 2003
Asia	4,188,100	28,900	1,995,700	2,940,600	225,700	9,378,900
Africa	3,343,700	159,600	345,300	715,100	29,600	4,593,200
Europe	2,136,300	366,800	84,000	1,171,500	645,400	4,403,900
North America	615,100	446,100	—	—	—	1,061,200
Latin America & Caribbean	41,100	9,100	—	950,000	50,100	1,050,300
Oceania	65,400	3,900	—	—	—	69,200
TOTAL	**10,389,700**	**1,014,400**	**2,425,000**	**5,777,200**	**950,800**	**20,556,700**

**Includes 1.1 million IDPs who returned home in 2002*

MAJOR REFUGEE ARRIVALS DURING 2002

Origin	Main countries of asylum	Total
Liberia	Sierra Leone / Guinea / Côte d'Ivoire	105,000
D.R. Congo	Burundi / Tanzania / Zambia	39,000
Burundi	Tanzania	29,000
Somalia	Yemen / Kenya	24,000
Côte d'Ivoire	Liberia / Guinea	22,000
Central African Rep.	Chad / Congo	20,000
Nigeria	Cameroon	17,000
Sudan	Uganda / Kenya / Central African Rep.	16,000
Angola	Zambia / D.R. Congo	8,000
Rwanda	Uganda / Tanzania	6,000

1 Ten largest movements. *TABLE*

MAJOR VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION MOVEMENTS

[in 2002, by destination1]

To (Country of Origin)	From (Main Countries of Asylum)	Total
Afghanistan	Pakistan / Iran	1,958,000
Angola	Zambia / D.R. Congo / Namibia	88,000
Sierra Leone	Guinea / Liberia	76,000
Burundi	Tanzania / D.R. Congo	54,000
Rwanda	Tanzania / D.R. Congo	39,000
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Serbia-Montenegro / Croatia / Sweden / Germany	42,000
Somalia	Ethiopia / Djibouti	32,000
Timor-Leste	Indonesia	32,000
Liberia	Côte d'Ivoire	22,000
Eritrea	Sudan	20,000

1 Ten largest movements. *TABLE7*

MAIN COUNTRIES OF RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES [in 2002]

United States 26,300
Canada 10,400
Australia 9,200
Norway 1,200
Sweden 1,000
New Zealand 670
Finland 570
Denmark 490
Netherlands 160
Ireland 23

BASIC FACTS

[as of 1st July 2003]

- Number of UNHCR offices worldwide including Headquarters: 251 in 115 countries
- UNHCR staff members, including short-term staff: 6,235
- Staff members in the field: 5,325 (85% of total)
- Ratio of staff members to people of concern to UNHCR: 1 per 3,300
- Total UNHCR budget for 2003: US$ 1.16 billion
- Total budget for 2002: US$ 1.06 billion
- Number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working as implementing partners in July 2003: 514
- Total number of NGOs as implementing partners in 2002: 573
- States party to the 1951 Convention and/or to the 1967 Protocol: 145

1 Source: Governments.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

● At the start of the year 2003, the number of people of concern to UNHCR was 20.6 million. They included 10.4 million refugees (51%), 1.0 million asylum seekers (5%), 2.4 million returned refugees (12%), 5.8 million internally displaced persons (28%) and 951,000 others of concern (4%).

● The figure of 20.6 million uprooted persons was a slight increase compared with 19.8 million the previous year. It reflected modest demographic, legal and administrative adjustments and several important trends: a huge increase in the number of uprooted people returning home, a dramatic fall in the number of new refugees, but an equally large increase in the number of people needing continued assistance once they returned home and began rebuilding their lives.

● The global refugee population dropped sharply from 12 million to 10.4 million, principally because of the return of nearly 2 million Afghans from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.

● However, the number of people receiving assistance once they had gone back home—returnees—shot up from 462,000 in 2001 to 2.4 million in 2002.

● There were 293,000 new refugees registered in 2002, a drop of 69% compared with the previous year. Major exoduses occurred from Liberia (105,000), the Democratic Republic of Congo (39,000), Burundi (29,000), Somalia (24,000) Côte d'Ivoire (22,000) and Central African Republic (20,000).

● Asia hosted nearly half of all the people of concern to UNHCR, 9.4 million people or 46%, followed by Africa 4.6 million (22%), Europe 4.4 million (21%), North America and Latin America 1 million each (10%) and Oceania 69,200 (0.3%).

● The number of asylum applications submitted during 2002 or still pending totalled 1.0 million compared with 940,000 in 2001. Reflecting new global political and military realities, Iraqi nationals were the largest single group of claimants while the number of Afghans seeking asylum dropped by more than 50 percent.

● Overall, major refugee hosting countries are: Iran (UNHCR estimate: 1.3 million), Pakistan (UNHCR estimate: 1.2 million), Germany (980,000), Tanzania (690,000), United States (UNHCR estimate: 485,000), Serbia and Montenegro (350,000), Democratic Republic of Congo (330,000), Sudan (330,000), China (300,000) and Armenia (250,000).

APPENDIX II: UNHCR MISSION STATEMENT

Hungarians resettled in Europe from Austria

©UNHCR

UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the world-wide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. UNHCR's primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. UNHCR strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, and to return home voluntarily.

By assisting refugees to return to their own country or to settle in another country, UNHCR also seeks lasting solutions to their plight.

UNHCR's efforts are mandated by the organization's Statute, and guided by the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. International refugee law provides an essential framework of principles for UNHCR's humanitarian activities.

UNHCR's Executive Committee and the UN General Assembly have also authorized the organization's involvement with other groups. These include people who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed and, in certain circumstances, internally displaced persons.

UNHCR seeks to reduce situations of forced displacement by encouraging states and other institutions to create conditions which are conducive to the protection of human rights and the peaceful resolution of disputes. In pursuit of the same objective, UNHCR actively seeks to consolidate the reintegration of returning refugees in their country of origin, thereby averting the recurrence of refugee-producing situations.

UNHCR offers protection and assistance to refugees and others in an impartial manner, on the basis of their need and irrespective of their race, religion, political opinion or gender. In all of its activities, UNHCR pays particular attention to the needs of children and seeks to promote the equal rights of women and girls.

In its efforts to protect refugees and to promote solutions to their problems, UNHCR works in partnership with governments, regional organizations, international and non-governmental organizations. UNHCR is committed to the principle of participation by consulting refugees on decisions that affect their lives.

By virtue of its activities on behalf of refugees and displaced people, UNHCR also promotes the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter: maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations; and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

APPENDIX III: STATUTE

OF THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Chapter I General Provisions

1. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, acting under the authority of the General Assembly, shall assume the function of providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting Governments and, subject to the approval of the Governments concerned, private organizations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities. In the exercise of his functions, more particularly when difficulties arise, and for instance with regard to any controversy concerning the international status of these persons, the High Commissioner shall request the opinion of the advisory committee on refugees if it is created.

2. The work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees.

3. The High Commissioner shall follow policy directives given him by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council.

4. The Economic and Social Council may decide, after hearing the views of the High Commissioner on the subject, to establish an advisory committee on refugees, which shall consist of representatives of States Members and States non-members of the United Nations, to be selected by the Council on the basis of their demonstrated interest in and devotion to the solution of the refugee problem.

5. The General Assembly shall review, not later than at its eighth regular session, the arrangements for the Office of the High Commissioner with a view to determining whether the Office should be continued beyond 31 December 1953.

APPENDIX IV: THE 1951 UN REFUGEE CONVENTION

©UNHCR 1953

After years in a German refugee camp, this family prepares to resettle to New Zealand and begin a new life.

Soon after the Second World War, as the refugee problem had not been solved, the need was felt for a new international instrument to define the legal status of refugees. Instead of ad hoc agreements adopted in relation to specific refugee situations, there was a call for an instrument containing a general definition of who was to be considered a refugee. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons held in Geneva on 2 - 25 July 1951. It was opened for signature on 28 July and entered into force on 22 April 1954.

The Convention spells out the obligations and rights of refugees, and the obligations of states towards refugees. It also sets out international standards for the treatment of refugees. It embodies principles that promote and safeguard refugees' rights in the fields of employment, education, resistance, freedom of movement, access to courts, naturalization and, above all, the security against return to a country where they may risk persecution. Two of the most important provisions are found in Articles 1 and 33:

Article 1 —Definition of the term 'refugee '

A(2) [Any person who] ....owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence ... is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it ...

Article 33 —Prohibition of expulsion or return ('refoulement')

1. No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion ...

The refugee definition contained in the 1951 Convention was limited to persons who became refugees "as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951". The time limitation, however, was subsequently removed by Article I(2) of the 1967 Protocol to the Convention. When becoming a party to the 1951 Convention, states also had the possibility of making a declaration limiting their obligations under the Convention to refugees from events occurring in Europe.

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention – along with its 1967 Protocol – is still the most important, and the only universal, instrument of international refugee law. By 1 February 2004, 138 states had acceded to both the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and 145 states had ratified either one or both of these instruments.

State of the World's Refugees 2000
Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees HCR/IP/4/Eng/REV.1

APPENDIX V: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Asylum *is a place of safety, a refuge. International law states that the individual has the right to seek sanctuary in another country, if that individual is in danger in the country of origin.*

Asylum seeker *is a person who has crossed an international border and asked for asylum in another country. An asylum seeker has asked for protection and the right not to be returned to a country where he or she would face danger. If refugee status is given to that person, he or she has the right to stay in the new country as long as is needed.*

Civil war *is a war between different groups of people in the same country.*

Durable solution *is any means by which the situation of refugees can be satisfactorily and permanently resolved to enable them to live normal lives. UNHCR traditionally pursues three durable solutions: voluntary repatriation, local integration in the country of asylum and resettlement in a third country.*

Ethnic group *is a group of people who think of themselves as being of the same kind; they may share a variety of features, such as race, culture, nationality and religion.*

General Assembly of the United Nations *is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations. It is composed of representatives of all Member States, each of which has one vote. Decisions on important questions such as those on peace and security, admission of new members and budgetary matters, require a two-thirds majority. Decisions on other questions are reached by a simple majority.*

Host country *is the country to which asylum seekers have fled.*

Human rights *are rights to which every person is entitled. Rights that are laid down in law are called legal rights. In some countries, human rights are not respected. Human rights are universal moral rights. They apply to all people, at all times and in all situations. The most important international human rights law is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.*

Humanitarian *describes the concern for the well-being of humankind.*

Internally displaced persons (IDP) *are people who have been forced to flee their homes because of war or other dangers. Unlike refugees, they do not cross international boundaries but remain in their own country. There are no specific international human right laws to protect them.*

Mandate *is the authority is given to a body or organization to carry out specific policies.*

Non-governmental organization (NGO) *is a voluntary organization, not run by government.*

Persecution *generally refers to any severe violation of human rights. In the refugee context, "persecution" refers to any act by which fundamental rights are severely violated for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.*

Refoulement *is the removal of a person to a territory where she/he would be at risk of being persecuted, or of being moved to another territory where she/he would face persecution. Refoulement constitutes a violation of the principle of non-refoulement, and is therefore a breach of refugee law and of customary international law.*

Refugee *is a person who flees his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. A refugee either cannot return home, or is afraid to do so.*

Repatriation *is the act of someone returning to his or her home country. This can be an enforced policy (known as refoulement), or people can repatriate voluntarily, often with the help of UNHCR.*

Returnee *is a person who ceased to be a refugee after returning voluntarily to his/her country or origin to re-establish his/her residence there.*

United Nations (UN): *An international assembly of countries to maintain world peace and security and to promote cultural, social and economic cooperation. It was established in 1945 and has more than 190 members.*

UN Country Team *is composed of the UN funds and programmes, specialized agencies and other UN entities accredited to a given country. The main objective of the Country Team system is to ensure that a coherent approach is taken by UN bodies in their collective response to humanitarian, development, and other strategies relevant to the country in which they are operating.*

UNHCR: *The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly and is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect and resolve refugee problems worldwide.*

UN Refugee Convention, 1951: *The most important legal agreement concerned with refugees: it provides a definition of the term 'refugee', and sets out minimum standards for their treatment.*