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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Assistance to refugees and displaced persons in Malawi

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Malawi is a land-locked country in south-eastern Africa bordered by Mozambique, Zambia and the United Republic of Tanzania. The population in this nation of a mere 111,000 square kilometres is eight million.

2. Refugees from Mozambique have been arriving in substantial numbers in Malawi since the mid-1980s, although many had been registered during the late 1970s and early 1980s as well. It is noteworthy that these refugees from adjacent areas in Mozambique share similar ethnic backgrounds, family ties and language with the Malawians and have in fact settled in or next to existing Malawi villages. The Malawians themselves have a history of regularly crossing the frontier to tend to their fields in Mozambique. Most of those refugees which have arrived more recently from distant areas of Mozambique are from the south and have settled in camp-like locations, as there was no possibility to integrate (as in the case of the other groups). Since 1984, UNHCR has provided individual assistance to mainly urban refugees through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, substantial numbers of Mozambicans started to enter Malawi in mid-June 1986, eventually totalling 70,000 refugees by September of that year, the majority of whom settled in frontier regions in the southern and central regions of the country. At present, refugees are found in 10 of Malawi's 24 administrative districts; the following breakdown compares statistics on 1 April 1988 and 1 April 1989:

<u>District</u>	<u>Population</u>	
	<u>1 April 1988</u>	<u>1 April 1989</u>
Lilongwe	15 090	27 148
Dedza	67 102	122 819
Ntcheu	125 019	136 707
Mchinji	-	3 129
Mangochi	21 111	27 392
Machinga	-	13 985
Mulanjo	12 765	39 427
Mwanza	22 614	22 340
Chikwawa	15 957	32 099
Nsanje	189 541	221 818
Total	469 199	646 864

3. United Nations inter-agency missions were undertaken in December 1987 and November 1988 for the purpose of assessing the impact of massive arrivals of refugees confronting the Government and people of Malawi. The results of those two

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missions have been project submissions for long-term assistance needs to be implemented by UNDP and other organizations. However, no firm indication of donor interest has, apparently, been made. The November 1988 mission followed up on the conclusions of the 1987 mission and examined the Government's extrabudgetary costs caused by the refugee programme and diverted from local development activities for Malawians.

II. ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI

4. From the very beginning of the Mozambican influx, the Government and people of Malawi have maintained a generous and exemplary attitude towards the asylum-seekers. Existing services and infrastructure for local Malawians have been whole-heartedly shared with the refugees. Until the second half of 1986, the Malawi Government did not feel the need to call upon the international community to provide external support and the Malawi Red Cross was entrusted with the co-ordination and distribution of relief supplies to Mozambicans. The growing influx led the Government to establish the Joint Operations Committee in December 1986, chaired by the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health, to co-ordinate assistance efforts of the various Government departments and agencies concerned. In the last quarter of 1988, an executive secretariat to the Joint Operations Committee was set up in the Office of the President and Cabinet, in order to implement directives more effectively.

5. In early 1987, the Government of Malawi invited UNHCR to assist Mozambicans; at that time, an office was opened in Lilongwe. In November 1987, the Malawi Government ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1/ and its 1967 Protocol, 2/ as well the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa. 3/ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees visited Malawi and signed a formal Country Agreement with the Government of Malawi in April of 1988.

6. In June of 1988, a consultative group meeting organized by the World Bank in Paris drew attention to both the plight of the refugees, as well as to the circumstances of local Malawians. The Government of Malawi had requested that the situation of refugees in Malawi be included on the agenda. In an official statement made by it at that time, the Government urgently called upon the donor community to extend support, not only to ongoing development projects in refugee hosting areas, but also to refugee related proposals underscored in the reports of the inter-agency missions that had been carried out earlier.

7. In December of 1988, a Tripartite Agreement was established to provide a formal framework for the repatriation of Mozambicans when conditions permit. The Governments of Malawi and Mozambique and UNHCR were signatories to that Agreement, which will meet quarterly on repatriation questions.

III. AREAS OF ASSISTANCE

A. Land

8. The Government of Malawi had initially allowed refugees to settle among the local population. However, with the rapid increase in numbers, it became apparent that sufficient land for the refugees to grow their own food would not be available. For this reason, the Government wished to discourage refugee settlements and thus, large refugee concentrations emerged side by side with the local population. Due to congestion in certain districts (e.g., Nsanje, where the district population has more than doubled since the refugee influx, efficient administration required that refugees be moved to specific sites, where minimum infrastructure was provided. Although new sites have been opened to keep up with the rate of the arrivals, the shortage of land remains a serious problem, both for the refugees and for the country.

B. Food

9. UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) have recently assessed the basic requirements of the refugee programme at some 185,530 tons of basic, supplementary and therapeutic food (including buffer stocks). Serious difficulties arose during 1988 as a result of matching the food requirements to the numbers of refugees in the face of a high and sustained rate of influx (some 140,000 Mozambicans entered Malawi during the period from May to June 1988 alone). WFP is the co-ordinator for the supply of most basic food items. UNHCR purchases additional basic commodities, supplementary and therapeutic food. The basic daily individual rations scale for 1989 is as follows:*

Maize	400 and 450 grams**
Pulses	60
Groundnuts	40
Oil	20
Sugar	20
Salt	05

* Not all food commodities are currently available.

** 400 grams of maize meal are provided to new arrivals and refugees in Nsanje District; 450 grams of whole maize given all other refugees on trial basis.

C. Health

10. Overall responsibilities for this sector remain with the Ministry of Health, which exercises its mandate through a district medical system, Médecins sans frontières - France, the International Rescue Committee and the American Refugee Committee supplement the government units, particularly in the nutrition and training sectors.

D. Water

11. The current objective is to provide one potable water point equipped with standardized pumps for every 750 refugees in camps and areas hosting large numbers of refugees. The original target of one water point per thousand was reached by the end of 1988. Over the last year, existing water points were rehabilitated and new water points (boreholes, shallow wells and springs) were built. The Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom) has been working with the Water Department since the second half of 1988 and has established training programmes for hand-pump maintenance and shallow well-digging.

E. Domestic needs

12. Blankets, clothing, soap, water containers and cooking pots continue to be provided to new arrivals. Both local and international non-governmental organizations have provided UNHCR with this assistance from their own programmes.

F. Shelter

13. Provision has been made to cover the needs of vulnerable families and to assist them in maintaining appropriate shelter through the distribution of plastic sheeting, tarpaulins and poles, while at the same time, and for hygienic reasons, upgrading the burgeoning markets in the refugee villages and sites.

G. Community services and education

14. The goal of the developing-community services sector aims at activities to increase refugee participation and where appropriate, to produce income-generation or income-savings projects. In addition, it is planned to provide assistance to vulnerable groups, including women and children that may need individual assistance to adjust to their new status. As for primary education, class-rooms continue to be constructed (on a self-help basis where possible), teachers are being hired and a training programme based upon the Mozambican curriculum is being set up in close collaboration with the Mozambican Ministry of Education and the Malawi authorities. At present, some 50,000 children are in school.

H. Crop production, livestock and animal husbandry

15. Owing to the shortage of available land, no large-scale projects are envisaged in agriculture. Some refugees will benefit from small fruit and vegetable gardens and other small-scale agricultural activities, while those refugees which have managed to bring livestock will benefit from veterinary services.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

16. The only long-term solution for refugees in Malawi is their voluntary repatriation back to Mozambique when conditions permit. In the mean time and for the foreseeable future, the international community must provide care and maintenance to sustain the refugees. Simultaneously, the international community must also address the long-term effects of the refugee population on Malawi and on its people. Serious long-term damage has been inflicted upon the country and the environment. Forests have been denuded to supply fuel to the refugees; heavy vehicles supplying refugee areas have degraded the existing road network; water points, already in a poor state of repair, are now stretched to cover the needs of the refugees; health facilities are crowded and understaffed owing to the new demands of the influx. In fact, services of the Government must now perform the task of supporting both national and refugee populations, often to the detriment of Malawian citizens. The international community has made modest attempts to address the problems but the requirements are considerable and existing programmes can in no way cover all the needs. Additional programmes of specialized long-term development are therefore urgently needed.

Notes

- 1/ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, No. 2545, p. 137.
- 2/ Ibid., vol. 606, No. 8791, p. 267.
- 3/ Ibid., vol. 1001, No. 14691, p. 45.
