

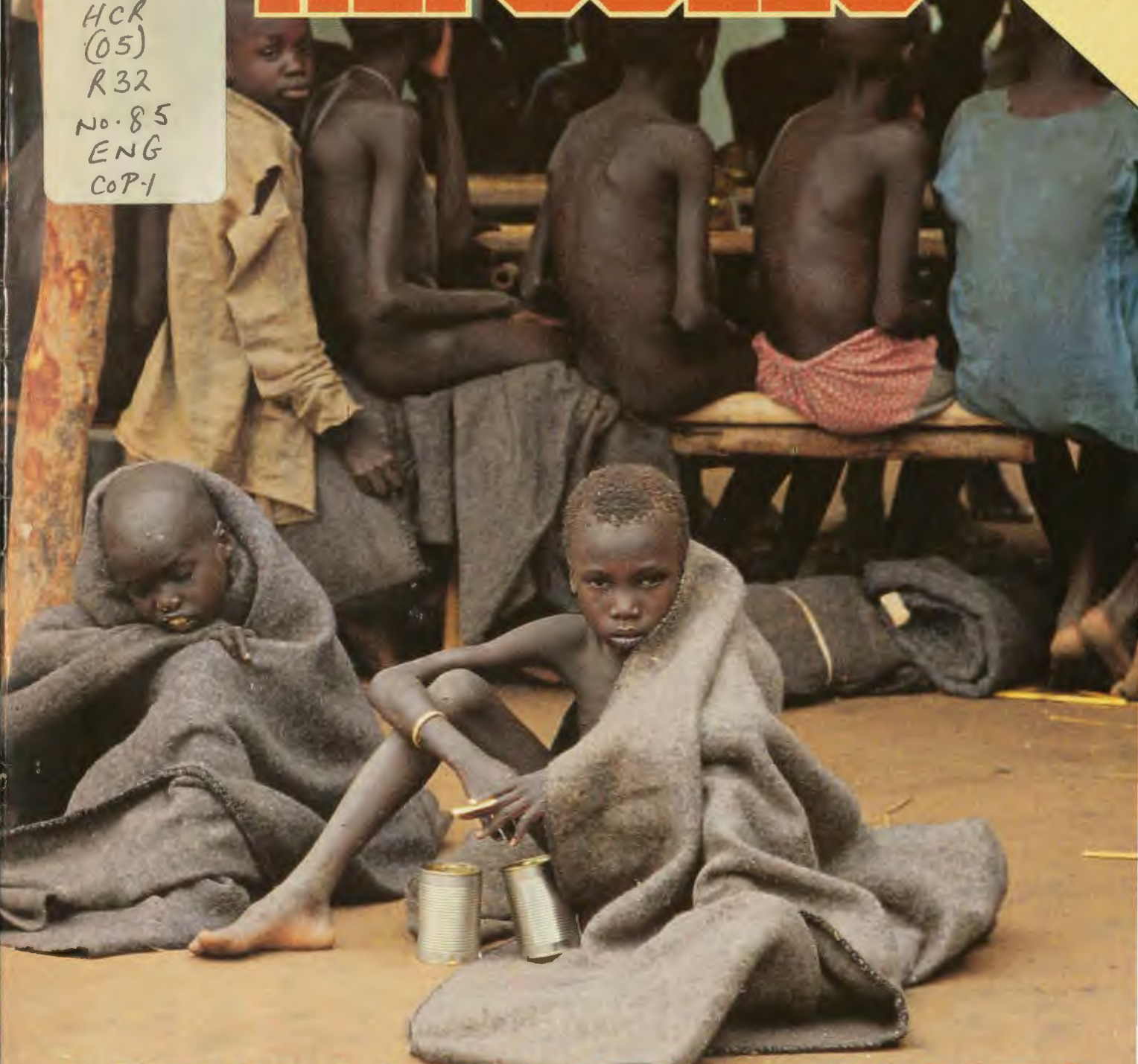


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# REFUGEES

EXODUS FROM IRAQ



## AFRICAN EMERGENCIES









# Telling the truth

This issue of REFUGEES contains some shocking stories and images. In our special report, we examine the tragic exodus of over 1.5 million Iraqis towards Iran and Turkey – one of the largest and fastest refugee movements in the 40-year history of UNHCR.

This month's dossier takes a close look at current emergencies in Africa, focusing on the plight of around 1.2 million refugees and returnees in Ethiopia, a third of whom have arrived from Somalia since the beginning of the year.

As the following articles and photographs demonstrate, both of these situations have seen enormous human suffering and a substantial loss of life. Our purpose in describing them is not to produce feelings of horror or guilt. It is simply to tell, in as direct a manner as possible, the truth about today's refugee world.

Many aspects of that world are heartening and inspiring: the courage and enterprise and sheer determination exhibited by many uprooted people; the generosity of the communities which give them refuge; and the joy and relief shared by refugees who are finally able to go home.

But that is less than half of the story. Although some refugees seem to flourish in exile, many more are struggling to survive. While many countries – especially the poorer ones – have kept their doors open to the victims of persecution and conflict, others are slamming them shut. And although some exiles are returning to their homes, their number is greatly exceeded by the flow of new refugees, escaping from countries where their life and liberty are threatened, often with nothing except the clothes on their back.

Those who suffer most in such situations are almost always the poorest members of society and those who are especially vulnerable: children, mothers, the elderly and disabled. Minority groups – ethnic, racial and religious – are also at special risk. That is the hard reality of life at the end of the 20th century, a reality which is reflected in the pages of this magazine.

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Page 2: A Chadian refugee near El Geneina, western Sudan. UNHCR/S. Errington  
Page 39: Iraqi refugees wait for relief on the Turkish border. © KeyColor





© Namibian Refugee Project

## The flow of arms

I was going through my collection of your magazines and noticed that African refugees dominated many of them, which is very sad. As an African student in Germany, studying international relations, I feel that the best way of solving Africa's problems is not by sending food and medical aid, but by checking the flow of arms and ammunition from the developed nations. If the UN Security Council can impose sanctions on Iraq, then why can it not impose an arms and ammunition embargo on countries where there is conflict? If this problem is not solved, all the efforts made by UNHCR in Africa will be worthless.

DERRICK O'NEAL  
Germany

## Equal basis

Including refugees in the social and economic activities of their host country is the best way of reducing the burden which they impose on local people. Tanzania provides a good example of this kind of participation. Many of the Burundi, Rwandese and Zairean refugees living in Tanzania no longer receive direct assistance from UNHCR because they are self-sufficient.

Despite being amongst the poorest countries in the world, the Tanzani-

an government is now supporting refugee projects in fields such as construction, social services and vocational training centres. We regard refugees as our brothers and sisters, and so we have granted Tanzanian citizenship to some of them and allowed others to participate in the economy. In urban areas one can even find refugees working in government offices. Although they compete with local people for limited jobs, housing and education, they are treated on an equal basis.

I feel that many other countries in the world could follow this example. It might be necessary to give refugees food aid in situations where there is an acute shortage of fertile land. But in countries where they can grow their own crops, refugees should not be dependent on assistance.

ZENNO P. NGOWI  
Dodoma, Tanzania

## Study group

I would like to express my deep gratitude for the many efforts which have been made recently to provide moral and material assistance to both refugees and the countries which have granted them asylum.

I am a Guinean citizen. Like any country, Guinea has its own problems. But they are rather less serious and long-lasting than those with which you are constantly confronted. Those situations which come to mind, among others, are the civil war in Liberia, one of the chief preoccupations of my government, the conflicts in Somalia and Ethiopia, the economic sanctions imposed on South Africa, and the war in the Persian Gulf.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you that, with a group of friends, I have set up a study group in order to evaluate the most serious problems affecting firstly our own region and, secondly, those affecting the rest of the African continent and the world at large.

MORLAYE KONATE  
Conakry, Guinea

# REFUGEES

**Editor-in-Chief:** Annick Roulet

**Editors:** Jeff Crisp, Sylvie Girard

**Photo-Research:** Anneliese Hollmann,  
Estelle Knüsli

**Layout:** Joëlle Decarroz

**Editorial Assistants:** Jan Hazell,  
Virginia Zekrya

**Administration:** Brigitte Bartel

**Distribution:** Nicholas Birch,  
John O'Connor

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**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

P.O. Box 2500

1211 Geneva 2 Dépôt, Switzerland

Phone: (022) 739 81 11

Cable: HICOMREF Geneva

Telex: 412 972 PIHC-CH

415 740 UNHCR-CH

REFUGEES Fax: (022) 739 84 49

Headquarters Fax: (022) 731 95 46

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*Islamic Republic of Iran***A terrible tragedy**

UNHCR/J. Crisp

**"A terrible human tragedy is unfolding right in front of us. A massive mobilization of international resources is needed to avert it." Those were the words of UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata at the**

**conclusion of a recent visit to the border areas of Iran and Turkey, where more than 1.5 million uprooted Iraqis have gathered. REFUGEES accompanied Mrs Ogata on her journey.**

Meryam K. pulls a scarf across her head, shielding her face from the biting wind which blows along the mountain pass. She digs deep into the pockets of her dress, pulls out a crumpled sheet of paper, and tears a piece from the corner. "You want to know how much we have to eat?" she asks, holding the scrap of paper high in the air. "Well, we don't even have that much. We have absolutely nothing."

Meryam is just one of the million or more Iraqi refugees who have flocked into the border provinces of Iran. She is tired, cold and hungry.

She does not know what has happened to the other members of her family. And she cannot conceal her bitterness about the events which have forced her to become a refugee. "Why did they allow this to happen?" she asks. "Why do we have to suffer like this?"

Meryam is not alone in her suffering. At the frontier post of Nowsod, hundreds of refugees cross the border every hour, many of them bringing just a rolled up blanket or a flimsy sheet of polythene to protect them from the wet and freezing weather. As Fria, an Iraqi doctor, explains,

many do not make it this far. "It took me 11 days to get here from my home in Sulaymaniyah, and during that time I saw at least 100 people dying by the roadside."

At Gerdeno, more than 80,000 Iraqis have congregated on the floor of a valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Large crowds of men and boys mill around, waiting to swoop on any truck which makes its way into the hastily established camp. Desperately waiting for the next delivery of food, they usually discover that the incoming vehicles are simply bringing new arrivals from



the border. Tents and makeshift shelters stretch as far as the eye can see. But there is not enough room for everyone. In a small clearing we come across a group of six or seven mothers, huddled together with their backs to the wind, their babies held tightly to their breasts. All of them are weeping.

At Bivar on the border between Iran and Turkey, a catastrophe is also waiting to happen. Thousands of

refugees have gathered at the site, but there is scarcely any assistance available for them. The food which they were able to bring from Iraq has almost run out, and no-one knows how they will be fed. "Absolutely everything is needed here," explains UNHCR staff member Pierre Vinet. "Blankets, tents, high protein foods and medicine. And we need it in the next 24 hours. Otherwise, many people simply won't survive."

## The view from Tehran

*Iran now has the largest refugee population in the world – more than three and a half million Afghans and Iraqis. How does the country view this situation? We put the question to Akhun Zade, Director of the International Organizations Department in the Iranian Foreign Ministry.*

*The Iraqi influx is an unprecedented refugee movement in terms of numbers, speed and conditions. It has been much more sudden and unexpected than the Afghan influx that we experienced in the 1980s. But our policy is to keep the border open, and we are doing our best to cope with the situation. It has not been easy. We had a major earthquake in Iran last June, and serious floods have occurred this year. We have also had to deal with the effects of the war in the Persian Gulf, including the arrival of some 30,000 refugees from Kuwait.*

*The Iranian people have traditionally helped those in need, even when they are confronted with shortages themselves. To mark the end of Ramadan, for example, the national TV station organized a special event in a Tehran stadium. All the proceeds will go to the Iraqi refugees. Even in rural areas, the people are mobilizing whatever help they can. But the problem is so big that we cannot handle it with our own resources alone.*

*We feel that it was essential for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to come here and have a*

*personal view of the situation, as she is directly responsible for the welfare of refugees. I am sure that she will now take a message to the international community, explaining the extent of the tragedy which has taken place. It is a humanitarian problem to which the world must respond.*

*There have been many shortcomings in the assistance which we have received so far. But I am not disappointed. It is a question of awareness. The international community does not consist solely of governments and organizations, and I am sure that when ordinary people around the world see the suffering of the refugees from Iraq, they will respond with great kindness. We feel that seeing is believing, and so we do not want people to rely on our words. We want the international media to report on the situation here.*

*The first priority is to give relief to the new arrivals. But we also want to think of the longer term. The refugees – especially the children – do not just have a right to survive. They should also be able to look forward to a safe and prosperous future. As far as the Afghans are concerned, some repatriation is taking place, and we are looking further at ways and means of helping them to return. The Iraqis have much greater fear and apprehension about the situation in their homeland. We hope that the High Commissioner will also be considering their future in her efforts to respond to this crisis.*

JC

Alias Ahmad, another member of the UNHCR team, says that he and other experienced relief workers have been severely shocked by the plight of the Iraqi refugees. "But," he adds, "the situation would have been far worse had it not been for the efforts of the Iranian government and people."

Since the early days of the crisis, Iran has kept its border open to the refugees, helping them to move on as quickly as possible from crossing points in the mountains to camps and reception centres in more accessible sites. Schools, warehouses and other public buildings have been pressed into service as emergency shelters and hospitals. Many ordinary people have opened their doors to the refugees. The town of Sardasht, for example, has seen its population rise from 20,000 to 150,000 in a matter of days. "There are now two or three refugee families living in every house," explains a local UNICEF worker.

## State expenditure

The Iranian authorities have done their best to mobilize the massive amounts of assistance needed to feed, clothe and shelter the million new arrivals. Government officials in Tehran estimate that state expenditure on refugee relief amounts to around US\$ 10 million a day. Much of this sum is channelled through the Iranian Red Crescent Society and Ministry of the Interior, both of whom have a wealth of experience in responding to disasters.

The provincial authorities themselves are also diverting resources and manpower to the emergency programme. "My province suffered greatly during the eight-year war with Iraq," explains Zahraie Nekooi, Governor of Bakhtaran, where the largest number of refugees have arrived. "There is still a lot of reconstruction to do here, but my staff are working solely on the refugee emergency. There is no time for anything else."

Traditionally cautious in its contacts with the outside world, the Iranian government has made an urgent appeal for international assistance. At local level, much of the red tape has been cut out and the armed forces have been mobilized to ensure that incoming relief flights can be



quickly off-loaded. According to aid agency workers on the border, the goods are usually on their way to the camps within an hour of landing in the country.

UNHCR is working in close co-operation with the Iranian authorities, both to mobilize the necessary relief items and to organize their distribution. Since the beginning of the crisis, the organization has despatched 57 flights to Iran, carrying around 2,149 tons of supplies, including blankets, tents, high-protein biscuits, cooking equipment and a 200-bed field hospital donated by the Norwegian government.

But it is painfully obvious that the amount of assistance which has arrived so far is simply not commensurate with the scale of the refugee problem. "We have never seen anything like this before," says Kamal Morjane, head of UNHCR's South-West Asia bureau. "At the end of March we were prepared for an influx of up to 100,000 people. No-one could possibly have predicted the arrival of almost a million people in the



UNHCR/J. Crisp

first two weeks of April." "The situation remains critical," adds Omar Bakhiet, who is leading the organization's field operation in Iran. "Supplies are getting through, but too slowly and in insufficient quantity. Hundreds of people are dying every day."

And the situation will not get any easier, for the influx into Iran is far from over. Flying by helicopter over the border crossing at Paveh in West Azerbaijan, we were able to see an

endless convoy of trucks, cars and tractors, stretching back into Iraq for at least 30 or 40 kilometres. Similar scenes are reported from the other main entry points. Alias Ahmad, who has just completed an extensive survey of the northern border region, estimates that in addition to the million or more refugees who have already made their way to reception areas inside Iran, at least 500,000 more are waiting to enter the country.

Shocked by the suffering which she had witnessed on the border, the High Commissioner made an immediate appeal for additional assistance. "The only realistic response to an emergency of this magnitude is a massive airlift of relief supplies," she told journalists in Tehran. "Recent events in this part of the world have demonstrated that the international community can respond swiftly and decisively to a political crisis. The question now is whether the world can respond in equal measure to a humanitarian crisis."

JEFF CRISP



"We have never seen anything like this before."



## Turkey

# Rescued from the mountains

**At least 500,000 Iraqis have gathered in the mountainous border area with Turkey. Our reporter, a BBC radio journalist, visited a refugee camp and talked to some of the new arrivals.**

We first saw the Habur Hajj refugee camp from the air as our Turkish army helicopter circled before coming in to land. Row upon row of dark green tents had already been erected and scores more were being laid out on the ground, the guy ropes spread-eagled like spider's legs. As we spiralled closer the initials UNHCR stood out from the sturdy canvas.

On touchdown our arrival caused quite a stir. But after getting over the surprise of Mrs Ogata's arrival, the two UNHCR staff members working in the area coped with admirable efficiency. In the last 24 hours they had handled the arrival of 15 lorry-loads of tents trucked in from Syria, and welcomed the first wave of nearly 3,000 refugees bussed into the camp from the mountains.

The reason for Mrs Ogata's unscheduled visit was not one of bad planning but the foul weather conditions. Our original intention had been to visit some of the 500,000 or more refugees who had massed on eight mountain sites along the border between Iraq and Turkey. But the weather which has caused so much death and suffering for the Iraqis on the exposed mountainside forced a change of plan. During the flight from Diyarbakir our helicopter had been buffeted by strong cross-winds, and fog and a freezing mountain mist made flying any further extremely ill-advised.

Once safely on the ground and out of the helicopter it became clear that the situation was far from settled. We were seeing a refugee camp being born. Tents were still being erect-

ed, bulldozers were flattening areas for more shelters and men were cutting drainage ditches in the freshly scraped earth. The Turkish Red Crescent Society, which is providing the bulk of the aid workers for the camp, was at first reluctant to let so senior a UN official see the camp in this incomplete state. But using a characteristic combination of charm and persistence, Mrs Ogata persuaded the authorities to let her see the preparations at close quarters.

The first and most striking image was how quickly the Iraqi families were adapting to their new surroundings. They had been rescued from the mountains less than 20 hours before, but clothes were already out to dry in the wind, straining the lines which had been rigged between the tents. Wood had been collected – seemingly conjured from thin air – and fires kindled to boil up cooking pots brimming with vegetables. But

with us, and that soon ran out."

For Sudhi and his family there is now not only shelter but food distributed daily. No longer do they have to wait for supplies to be dropped from the air – a haphazard technique, but one which has kept thousands of people from starving to death in the mountains.

As well as providing food and shelter, the Habur Hajj camp also has a small hospital run by the Turkish Red Crescent Society. Inside we met Dr Erol Agish, a paediatric specialist from Ankara who was taking a break from a clinic he had set up to give medical checks to the refugee children.

"I established this paediatric clinic when I got here, and I found that most of the children had gastroenteritis and bronchial pneumonia. But with appropriate treatment they will recover. We have the drugs available to treat them. We are currently using Turkish

supplies, but we also have medicines on the way from international agencies."

Dealing with the refugees in Turkey has called for a big increase in the number of UNHCR people on the ground. Until this crisis developed, UNHCR had ten international staff with 27 local employees in Turkey. During our visit, plans were being made to increase this to 19 expatriates and 55 local staff. And of course,

it is impossible to predict how long they will be needed. Sudhi and his family have no idea when they will return to Iraq. For now they are just grateful to be alive. "We don't know when we can go home, but my family are safe and at least you can get running water here. On the mountain all we had to drink for over two weeks was melted snow."

CHRISTOPHER POWELL



*They have rapidly adapted to their new surroundings.*

the most moving sight was that of children lying asleep inside the tents – their first real rest since fleeing from their homes. Sudhi, the father of three, spoke to us of his utter relief to be in the camp. "We had been in the mountains more than two weeks. It was horrible, it was snowing, we had no blankets – our situation was unimaginable. We had only the food which we managed to carry



## Finland

**Desperately seeking Suomi**

Since the end of 1989, Finland has experienced an unprecedented influx of asylum seekers, both from eastern Europe and the Third World. As this article explains, their arrival has presented the authorities and the Finnish people with a major challenge.

Antony Zirabumaale is a 29 year-old Ugandan. He arrived in Finland in 1989, and after a four-month wait was informed that his request for refugee status had been denied. "I was told that I had just two weeks before I would be deported," says Antony. "I nearly went mad during those two weeks," he confides. "The Amnesty International office helped me get in touch with a Ugandan human rights activist in Stockholm, and from there a protest was launched on my behalf."

Until a few years ago, people such as Antony were an uncommon phenomenon in Finland. In 1989, only 179 people came to the country in search of asylum. But last year the figure jumped to over 2,700. While many of them are still waiting for an answer to their asylum requests, others are finding their way into Finland. There are between 20 and 30 new arrivals applying for refugee status each week. Early this year, a group of 163 Somalis crossed into Finland from the Soviet Union.

Why have so many asylum seekers chosen Finland, a country which is almost unknown to many non-Europeans? "Most countries, including the Nordic states, have tightened up their immigration policies. There are not many countries left except Finland," explains Auli Valle of the Finnish Red Cross. "The Somali and Romanian asylum seekers came via the Soviet Union," adds Esa Aallas, Information Secretary at the Finnish Refugee Council. "Unlike Finland, the USSR has no formal refugee policy and it is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Finland was the first western country they could reach to ask for asylum." Cheap air travel from Africa to the Soviet Union enabled groups of Somalis to take that route to the west.

Last year, some young Soviets flew to Finland in unsuccessful quests for asylum – by hijacking Aeroflot passenger planes. Other Soviet citizens have responded to the economic and political problems in their country by seeking asylum, although most have chosen less dramatic means of escape. At present,

these include some 30 conscientious objectors from the Soviet Baltic states.

Finland now accepts 500 people a year from refugee camps in other parts of the world, including substantial numbers with disabilities and other special needs. Special programmes have been established to



*A rapidly changing society.*





help them in the difficult task of adapting to Finnish society. In contrast to this group, the asylum seekers who arrive spontaneously in the country have no automatic right to remain. As in other parts of Europe, they must convince the authorities that they have a well-founded fear of persecution at home and are in need of protection.



© P. Verhala

When asylum seekers arrive in Finland they first register with the police. The police and the Aliens Centre are responsible for dealing with the applications, which involves investigating the background of each case. The process is a lengthy one, slowed down by a lack of trained staff. Last year, the Finnish Red Cross Society ran seven reception centres where asylum seekers were housed. By the beginning of this year a further ten centres were in operation. Motels, hotels, school dormitories and even a former hospital have been put to use.

While most of the asylum seekers seem quite happy with the arrangements provided for them, they have found that there are few ways to kill time during the lengthy and often frustrating months they have to wait before their cases are processed. Asylum seekers are not allowed to

work and with a daily allowance of just over US\$ 12.50 for food and clothing, there are few ways to alleviate the boredom.

Limited resources and an administration which is unused to dealing with so many requests for asylum mean that, on average, asylum seekers have to wait about eight months before hearing whether or not they have been recognized as refugees. In many instances, the wait has been much longer, and numerous asylum seekers have suffered from stress disorders, depression and other ailments.

One young Sri Lankan complains that he had to wait for over 15 months before receiving a reply to his application for asylum. It turned out to be negative. He says that he had about four months in which to collect and submit additional evidence about his case in an effort to get it reviewed. Failing that, he would be deported.

Antony Zirabumaale also went through this process. His deportation was delayed, and during the next four months, he was caught up in a frenzy of activity collecting additional information to support his case – a task which involved the efforts of Finnish lawyers, the offices of Amnesty International in Helsinki and London and even a Ugandan human rights organization in the United States. Eventually, Antony was given a residence permit, but without refugee status. The decision was once again contested in the courts, and it was only in February this year that he was granted a different kind of residence permit, giving him greater protection and the right to participate in the country's refugee integration programme. Antony is still unhappy with the decision, as he would like to convince the authorities that he deserves full refugee status.

Until recently, the Finnish Aliens Law left asylum seekers with relatively little opportunity to appeal against negative decisions. But under legislation which came into effect this March, the nerve-wracking ordeal suffered by Antony and other asylum seekers could be a thing of the past. The new law provides for the creation of an independent board of appeal to reassess the cases of asylum seekers whose first application

for refugee status has been turned down.

Sirkku Päivärinne, manager of the Malmi refugee centre, estimates that only about a third of all asylum seekers will eventually be able to stay in Finland. But according to Johanna Suurpää, a lawyer at the Finnish Refugee Council, the new law could increase that proportion by encouraging a more liberal definition of the term refugee, which in the past was subject to a rather narrow interpretation. "I expect that the situation will improve," she says. "The Organization of Democratic Lawyers in Finland had proposed amendments which were quite well reflected in the new law."

Improved legal rights for asylum seekers are just one of the demands made by voluntary agencies in Finland. In addition, they want to see the waiting period for asylum applications drastically reduced and the granting of limited work permits to those who have to spend more than two months waiting for an answer.

But better facilities and legal procedures will only partly solve the problems associated with the new influx of asylum seekers. Finland is still unprepared for the situation it faces. Its intensely homogenous society and culture has traditionally been unresponsive to outside influences, resulting in a climate of xenophobia which can even border on racism.

"It is clear that our presence is a new experience for Finnish people," says Max, an asylum seeker from Liberia. "I hope that as time goes on, more of them will understand that we are victims of circumstances and that we are not here out of choice." Sana, a Lebanese asylum seeker, points to the problem of trying to change popular attitudes towards the new arrivals. "People don't differentiate between us and other people who come here for economic reasons. They think that asylum seekers just want an easy life."

Auli Valle believes that as the number of refugees and asylum seekers in the country increases, Finland will inevitably change. "We're going to have a very different social mix here in the coming decades," he observes. "People are just now waking up to the fact."

MARK WALLER



## Honduras

## Return to the ancestral land

Ten years after they started to leave Nicaragua, most of the Miskito Indian refugees in Honduras have returned to their homes. REFUGEES was on the spot to see one of the last repatriation movements.

Santofimia throws a last look at the bamboo and palm hut which has been her home for the last nine years. Then, in an impatient voice that betrays her uneasiness, she calls out to her five children who, apparently oblivious to the impending change in their lives, are busy playing with the hens and roosters.

Darwin, a chubby three year-old who is Santofimia's youngest, gathers a full-grown rooster in his arms as he follows his mother down to the river. The bird is almost as big as the child. Darwin is obviously proud of his burdensome responsibility as he struggles to keep up with his mother, brothers and sisters. They are carrying an array of objects: bundles of clothing, sacks of rice, kitchen utensils, kerosene lamps, machetes, even umbrellas.

Santofimia is a Miskito Indian, who at Christmas time in 1981 fled

the banks of the River Coco along with 10,000 members of her community. Their purpose in moving was to escape from an official relocation programme which would have transferred them to a site 60 kilometres away from their existing settlements near the Honduran border, where Nicaraguan resistance (*contra*) incursions were taking place. To a Miskito, the sacred nature of the ancestral land along the banks of the River Coco was more important than the material well-being they might find in a new location.

Santofimia and her family were thus caught up in the historical conflict between Nicaragua's central government and its most remote and untamed territory – a conflict which has, throughout the centuries, stemmed from the uncomfortable relationship between Nicaragua's remote Atlantic coast, populated by Indians influenced by British buccaneers, and its flourishing Pacific coast, populated by Catholic Ladinos of Spanish descent.

The first large exodus of Miskitos from Nicaragua to Honduras took place in December 1981. UNHCR



UNHCR/A. Holmann

arrived in the region soon afterwards, and transported 25,000 refugees from the border to Mocarón. Many suffered from tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria and other ailments, and the crowded living conditions did little to improve the situation. But the refugees were very reluctant to move to settlements further inland. While some eventually agreed to relocate to more suitable areas along the Patuca, Coco and Mocarón rivers, between 10,000 and 15,000 stayed close to the border.

The repatriation process did not start until the mid-1980s, when the Miskito's Atlantic coast region was granted greater autonomy and an existing amnesty was expanded. In May 1987, just months before the historic Esquipulas II peace agreement, a Tripartite Commission was formed by the two governments concerned and UNHCR. This enabled an air-bridge to be established between Puerto Lempira in Honduras to Puerto Cebezas in Nicaragua. A border post was subsequently opened at Leimus on the River Coco, allowing the refugees to go home overland. From that time on, repatriation movements took place on a regular basis, accelerating significantly after the February 1990 election in Nicaragua.

Santofimia and her family are amongst the last of the Miskitos to return. She soon reaches the banks of the River Patuca, where 60 other Miskito refugees are sitting in a motorized dug-out canoe, waiting to be



UNHCR/E. Villegas

The way back home, on the River Coco.



gin the 45-minute trip downriver to the settlement of Wampusirpi. The few hundred refugees who remain are massed along the river banks, waving goodbye to relatives and friends. They know that in a few days, they too will start the long journey back home.

Upon arrival in Wampusirpi, Santofimia's family is offered the possibility of spending the night in a large house by the river, so that they can have a good sleep before continuing their homeward journey by air the following day. But like most of the women, Santofimia declines the offer and joins the men in a makeshift shelter, closer to the airstrip. The Miskitos are more concerned with sticking together than with comfort.

It is only a 15-minute flight to Mocorón. But for the overwhelming majority of passengers, it is their first plane ride. They try to hide their fear and excitement as they board the aircraft. Once in Mocorón, the refugees are accommodated in reception centres, where they receive an assistance package: a three-month food ration, a set of kitchen utensils, agricultural tools, a set of clothing, boots, mosquito nets and a blanket.

Once the formalities are over, the refugees climb onto trucks to begin the five-hour trip to Auasbila, on the River Coco. After spending the night in another reception centre there, they are up at daybreak to begin the last leg of their long journey home. It is now 7.30 a.m., and a heavy mist, punctured here and there by the early morning sun, shrouds the river in an atmosphere of solemn mystery.

The ancestral lands of the River Coco are reached only by one o'clock in the afternoon, after crossing five rapids. At each one, the returnees must disembark and walk along the river bank. After arriving in Nicaragua, the returnees receive a second assistance package from UNHCR: more food, some corrugated iron, nails and other items to help them build their new homes, as well as the seeds and agricultural tools needed to establish their farms. Although peace has come to Nicaragua, the process of reintegration could be a difficult one. The country has very serious economic problems, and local development projects are urgently needed if the returnees are to settle down successfully.

SYLVIE GIRARD

## Mexico

# The cornfields of Cieneguita

**For almost ten years, Mexico has played host to thousands of Guatemalan refugees, 90 per cent of whom are Mayan Indians. A journalist from the BBC visited both Mexico and Guatemala in order to examine their situation.**

Thousands of Guatemalans fled to the Mexican border state of Chiapas in the early 1980s, escaping from the violence which was taking place in their homeland. In the commune of Jerusalem we met Juan Juarez, who originally came from a poor village in Guatemala's mountainous western region, the Altiplano. Sitting in one of the refugees' huts, Juan told us how exile had affected their lives, how it had separated them from two of the most important things for the Mayan Indians: land, and the ability to grow corn, which has an almost religious significance. In Mayan mythology, man was born from a corn stalk. "Corn is the most important grain for us," Juan explained. "Without it, we cannot survive. We were taught by our parents to show respect for it and for the earth in general, which is like a mother to us because we depend on its fruits."

Juan has known nothing but poverty. In his home village of Santa Eulalia he eked out a living on a small plot of land, growing hardly enough to feed himself and his family. In 1974 he heard stories of a co-operative being set up in the Ixcán region by the Catholic Church. It offered the promise of a better life, and although the journey on foot was long and hard, he decided to go there with his family. They had to clear tracts of jungle before a crop could be planted, but soon they were part of a flourishing co-operative. Then the violence in Guatemala reached even this remote part of the country and he, like thousands of other peasants, was forced to flee to Mexico. Now they live on someone else's land and their future is far from certain.

Without land, the refugees have nothing to leave to their children and they can easily become trapped in the dependency syndrome. Acutely aware of this danger, UNHCR encourages the establishment of self-sufficiency programmes whenever possible. In Chiapas, however, one of Mexico's poorest states, there was great pressure on land even before the refugees' arrival. Although



*The camp has been built on stony, arid land.*

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*The refugees have succeeded in making the corn co-operative flourish.*

43,000 Guatemalan refugees are officially registered with UNHCR and COMAR, the Mexican government body responsible for refugees, both agencies admit that thousands more have never asked for help and are surviving in areas such as Mexico's Lacandon forests.

Responding to security problems and the difficulty of supporting such large numbers in Chiapas, COMAR decided to move the refugees further into Mexico, to the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo, where land is more plentiful. UNHCR respected this decision, and established self-sufficiency programmes in the new settlement areas. Rural development programmes and small co-operatives were established. For the refugees, however, there was a dilemma: the promise of land, but in an area that was culturally alien to them. In the end, only half of the refugees agreed to move, the others preferring to remain in Chiapas, in sight of the Guatemalan mountains.

Although life has been difficult for the refugees who chose to stay, all

those we met stressed that they wanted to take charge of their own lives and become self-sufficient. I remember in particular a visit to the camp of Cieneguita, where houses made of

**I**n Mayan mythology, man was born from a corn stalk. "Corn is the most important grain for us. Without it, we cannot survive..."

corn stalks and corrugated cardboard have been built on stony, arid land, where puny trees struggle for survival and the dust causes respiratory problems, particularly among children. Yet the people here have set up a corn co-operative, and with the sort of determination that enabled their pre-Columbian ancestors to build one of the world's most advanced civilizations, they have succeeded in making it flourish.

The cornfields are far from the camp, and the men have to leave at four in the morning to tend them. But enough money has now been saved to buy two mechanical corn grinders, and a mill co-operative run by the women has been established. Cieneguita also has schools and a clinic which the refugees share with the local Mexicans as a way of showing their appreciation.

This communal way of life has been an integral part of Mayan society for centuries. Mayan Indians have always practised a simple kind of socialism. In Guatemala, one finds flourishing co-operatives in remote villages, while much of the land that the Indians have managed to retain is considered the property of all.

Apart from poverty, one of the major factors affecting the lives of the Indians is illiteracy. It is estimated that 70 per cent of Mayan Indians are illiterate. In Cieneguita, the refugees know they cannot do anything about their situation unless they learn to read and write, and in Span-



ish. For although there are 22 Indian languages and Mayan Indians make up two-thirds of the population, the official language of Guatemala is Spanish.

## Literacy

In the camp, we met two Canadians, members of the Guatemalan Solidarity Group in Toronto, who had been invited by the women's co-operative to spend six weeks giving literacy classes. One of them, Ronnie Jaeger, was impressed by their eagerness to learn. "It's very common to hear people in this camp saying that when they go back to Guatemala, they want to be better informed, to be able to do things in Guatemala that are different from when they left."

Juan Juarez has also learned Spanish, although he admits that "Spanish is a foreign language to me and I still have difficulty learning it." His own language, like that of the people of Cieneguita, is Kanjobal. But Juan now holds a responsible position as a member of the refugee councils' permanent Commission, which among other things is negotiating with the Guatemalan government about a possible return.

**D**espite the fact that the majority of refugees want to return, only five or six thousand have done so. They want assurances about their safety, and also to be allowed to return to their own lands.

A voluntary repatriation programme was established by the Guatemalan authorities in 1987, and it has been carefully monitored by UNHCR. But despite the fact that the majority of refugees want to return, only five or six thousand have done so. Juan Juarez explains that the refugees have laid down ten conditions for return, including assurances about their safety and the demand that they be allowed to return to their own lands. "I didn't leave Guatemala because I wanted to," he told us, "but because I was forced to. So I will definitely go back once the conditions are right and I will gladly go."

TRISH WILLIAMS



# The challenge of the 1990s

Forty years after the creation of UNHCR, refugee and migration issues have forced their way onto the international agenda. Today, as never before, politicians and the public have recognized the need for action to prevent, or at least regulate, the uncontrolled movement of people within and across international borders. But what form should that action take? That is the question we examine in this feature, which opens with an important analysis by UNHCR's Director of International Protection.

The history of refugee movements is an integral feature of the history of mankind. But it is only in modern history that concerted action, at the international level, has been taken to alleviate the suffering of uprooted people and to find solutions to the problems faced by them and the states concerned.

The first half of the 20th century witnessed a whole series of political and military convulsions in Europe and the Near East, prompting massive exoduses of Russians, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds and other minority groups. Many initiatives were taken to assist them, but there was no common, universal refugee definition. For each situation, a separate agreement, arrangement or convention was concluded.

After the Second World War and the ensuing relocation or repatriation of millions of persons displaced by the conflict, international action for refugees had to adapt to profound political changes in the world: the establishment of communist regimes in various parts of the world, with mounting tensions and confrontations between them and the western powers; the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine, against the will of the Arab countries, and the ensu-



December 1956: 125,000 Hungarians found refuge in Austria.



ing confrontation between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Against this background, two organizations were put in place by the international community. First, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which was es-

would either return, of their own free will, to their countries of origin once the circumstances which had led to their departure had ceased to exist, or they would integrate in their new national communities, acquiring the citizenship of the host country.

tional community's ability to find solutions to the problems which are at the root of refugee movements. This atmosphere of confrontation has now disappeared. Can we then hope that refugee situations around the world are soon going to be resolved?



*November 1984: drought ravages Chad, forcing people to flee.*

established in 1949 to provide relief and assistance to the Palestinian refugees pending the resolution of their problems. And, second, in 1950, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which was created with a universal mandate to protect refugees and to seek permanent solutions to their problems. In the following year, the United Nations established a Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

The system put into place in 1950 was curative, not preventive in nature. Once a flow of refugees had taken place, the international community, led by UNHCR, had to ensure that the refugees were protected and able to survive. It was not foreseen that this survival operation should last for indefinite periods. Indeed, the system's second objective, as fundamental as the first one, was to see to it that they would cease to be refugees as soon as possible and be allowed to lead again a normal, self-sustained life. The refugees

That is how the situation of refugees coming from eastern Europe into western Europe was resolved in the 1950 and 1960s. That is how the situation of refugees in the Third World resulting from the wars of independence and the end of the colonial empires were dealt with. One could say that the system put in place in 1950 operated rather satisfactorily until the mid-1970s.

But from that time on, the system started to show alarming signs of disfunctioning, and even symptoms of paralysis. More and more refugee situations were emerging in different parts of the Third World, while it was increasingly difficult to find the necessary resources to bring relief to the people concerned. And for many, it was increasingly evident that no permanent solutions to their problems were in sight.

The political tensions and rivalries between the two superpowers were one of the important reasons for the increasing paralysis of the interna-

There are good reasons to believe that some will indeed gradually disappear, in spite of the still formidable difficulties in achieving this goal. For instance, there are grounds for hope in respect of the Afghan, Vietnamese, Angolan, Mozambican and other refugee problems. And some have indeed been resolved in recent years; most notably in Namibia, which in 1989 witnessed the voluntary repatriation of around 45,000 exiles from more than 40 countries all over the world.

But we have to admit that there is less room for optimism elsewhere. The Palestinian refugee problem, the Kurdish refugee problem, the Tamil problem, the problems of refugees in the Horn of Africa and Sudan all show few signs of being resolved. Indeed, in some respects they have become worse.

In the meantime, new mass population movements have emerged, threatening to disrupt the stability of entire societies, and to undermine



the world-wide system of international protection so patiently established over the past 70 years. One such challenge relates to the new and potentially explosive situations in eastern Europe affecting various minorities, ethnic groups or nationalities which claim that their political or civil rights are not adequately recognized. Perhaps an even greater challenge relates to the tremendous migratory pressures which are already provoking large movements of people between countries in the south, from the south to the north and from the east to the west.

UNHCR cannot ignore these migratory pressures because, as suggested already, they may disrupt the world-wide system of international refugee protection. In the early 1970s, around 13,000 asylum seekers were coming into western Europe each year, mostly from east European countries. Practically all were recognized as refugees. In 1988, 230,000 people applied for asylum in western Europe; in 1989, 320,000. It is expected that in 1991, 450,000 will apply. Sixty per cent of these asylum seekers come from the Third World and less than 20 per cent are going to be recognized as refugees.

This can partly be explained by the fact that the majority of people coming as asylum seekers into Europe are not refugees but economic migrants, who cannot apply as migrants because the immigration doors are closed in most countries. They thus clog up the asylum procedures which cannot function normally any longer. This in turn proves to be an attraction to many destitute persons abroad, who feel that if they apply for refugee status in a western country, they will be taken care of by the social welfare system of that country for a year or two, or even longer, while their claims are being examined.

Many of the people who fail to gain refugee status are not returned to their countries of origin. In some countries they remain illegally, and are used as cheap labour with no rights and no social protection. Thus while the official doors of migration are closed, unofficial doors remain open, and contribute to a new form of exploitation of foreign labour. In other countries, the authorities are reluctant to create waves of public protest by sending back people who

are finally determined not to be refugees, two or three years after first submitting their asylum request.

At this stage it would be useful to consider the root causes of mass movements of people. They fall broadly into two categories. On one hand, they are generated by the violence of man, by his intolerance towards his fellow human beings, by his efforts to dominate those around him. In this category are the victims of armed conflicts, of violation of human rights, of oppressive regimes which deny their citizens the enjoyment of fundamental rights and liberties. This is the category which produces refugees, people whose lives or liberty would be in danger if forcibly returned to their country of origin. On the other hand, there are the natural calamities, underdevelopment, poverty, socio-economic

**O**ne should always remember that when men, women and children decide to abandon their roots, it is after a period of agonizing appraisal and because this is their only chance of survival.

problems and ecological disasters which compel people to leave their country simply to survive. They are not refugees in need of asylum. They are human beings in distress and who are in need of assistance.

The solutions designed by the international community to respond to these various problems of mass population movements cannot be one and the same. To be accepted and to succeed, these solutions must take into account the causes which prompted the exodus. We have seen over the last 40 years that refugee problems which remain without solutions for too long lead to renewed instability, violence and conflict. Similarly, migratory problems, if not correctly and speedily addressed, may threaten the stability of vast regions of the world.

It is clear that the challenges facing the international community in the 1990s regarding migratory and refugee flows require urgent and innova-

tive re-thinking about a whole range of international action. Too many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, are confronted with the problem of mass displacement and do not receive appropriate assistance from the international community. That in turn locks these countries further into poverty, instability, and strife. Many of the people affected will feel that they have no option but to undertake the longer journey that ends at the doors of the developed world.

One should always remember that when men, women, and children decide to leave their place of origin and to abandon their roots, it is after a period of agonizing appraisal and because they are finally convinced that this is their only chance of survival. A relative improvement in their situation at home will very often suffice to prevent their departure when this is not motivated by a specific threat of persecution.

The international community must therefore organize itself in such a way as to remove the causes precipitating people to leave. Countries of origin must assume a significant responsibility in the search for appropriate solutions. If the international community is confronted with a flow of refugees, measures necessary to enable the refugees to return voluntarily should be identified, and the full political and economic weight of the international community should be impressed on the country of origin to produce the desired results. In some instances, initiatives should be taken to set in motion processes of mediation, conciliation and reconciliation between the parties involved, leading to the restoration of peace within a country. In other instances, vigorous action should be exercised to ensure that the citizens of the countries concerned are allowed to enjoy fundamental human rights, as prescribed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If the international community is confronted with a flow of destitute persons, massive economic, social and development aid should be made available to enable the country of origin to offer satisfactory living conditions to its citizens.

MICHEL MOUSSALLI

*A longer version of this paper was originally presented to the Swiss Institute of International Studies in Zurich.*



## Running out of control?

**The disparities of life between the world's richer and poorer countries have prompted an uncontrolled movement of people from the latter to the former. How should the states concerned, and the international community as a whole, respond to this phenomenon? In this article, the Australian government makes some concrete proposals.**

The peopling of our planet is testimony to our restlessness and our instinct for survival. People have always moved on when they are pushed out from where they are by economic, cultural or political pressures, or simply where they sense that there are better opportunities elsewhere. The factors underlying the contemporary scene are no different.

But while the aspirations to migrate are powerful, so too are the barriers. Throughout the 20th century, as intercontinental travel has expanded, nations have increasingly asserted their sovereign right to determine who may enter and remain within their territories. In all developed states migration, whether for permanent or temporary stay, is carefully regulated and structured around economic, social and demographic objectives. Authorized migration has something of a contractual character between the prospective migrant and the receiving state. While the individual chooses the state of intended residence, the state has absolute authority to determine whether it will admit the person and the conditions it will impose on their stay: whether this be as a visitor, a temporary worker, or for residency. Traditionally, the national interests of the receiving state shape the decision.

In the contemporary world, opportunities to migrate are, in fact, severely limited. The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and to a lesser extent the countries of Latin America are the traditional immigration countries of the so-called north. Yet the sum of their annual intakes is currently less than one million persons. Even the recently announced programme increases for Canada and the US will do little to come to

terms with the migratory expectations of the people of the south.

The states of Europe have not actively sought to expand their populations through migration, and do not operate migration programmes as such. To the extent that they have sought foreign residents, it is largely as guest workers, whose stay will be theoretically temporary. There are some ten million such people in Europe, many of whom have only tenuous status in the host state – and most of whom will resist a return to their country of origin.

With few opportunities for authorized migration, the mobile of the developing world are instead clambering over the immigration barricades erected against them. Some achieve this end by entering legally as visitors and going underground at the end of their authorized stay. The growth trend of the last decade, however, has been to use the asylum route.

This presents involved governments with complex and contradictory challenges. Until the last decade, asylum seekers arriving directly in the developed countries were few in number and overwhelmingly from eastern Europe. The ideological and ethical stance of the west assured their protection. The shift in

the direction of movements from an east-west orientation that had its origins fixed by the ideological conflict of the cold war, to that of south-north that in turn has had its origin in economic deprivation, has created problems that defy easy or comfortable resolution. It is a fact of contemporary international life that the humanitarian structure developed after the Second World War for refugee determination, of which the 1951 Convention is the centrepiece, does not easily lend itself to adaptations that could allow it to deal with the problem of economic and social deprivation that is the mainspring of much of the present phenomenon of mass movements.

Restrictive and exclusive immigration procedures have, nevertheless, worked to oblige many in this group to follow the asylum seeker route. The sheer number of those involved has resulted in the swamping of national refugee determination mechanisms, provoking a further round of restrictions by governments. These restrictions risk, in turn, the exclusion of those very people who the mechanisms were established to assist.

Many of the new asylum seekers are not refugees in the accepted sense, having been impelled to leave



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*Unless conditions in the south improve, uncontrolled outflows to the north will continue – in ever increasing numbers.*





UNHCR/A. Hoffmann

more by the lure of settling in a more prosperous and stable environment than any reason of persecution. These people still raise important humanitarian and ethical concerns for states. Governments, closely monitored by human rights and humanitarian interest groups, are reluctant to return people to situations of civil unrest and social and cultural disadvantage. While the number of people who are determined to be refugees is relatively small, the most telling figure is the 75 to 80 per cent of failed asylum seekers who remain in the country of reception, thus confirming the asylum process as a backdoor migration mechanism.

The force of this flow of people leaving their countries in search of stability and economic opportunity raises critical philosophical questions for states and for the international system as a whole. Unless we can develop appropriate international mechanisms, we will see an intensifi-

cation of pressure on all governments involved to concentrate on unilateral solutions which focus on immigration controls, and less and less on internationally agreed procedures. It is a matter of fact that most developed countries are already moving in this direction, with the broadening of visa requirements and the imposition of carrier sanctions.

The problem we confront is one of uncontrolled migration in circumstances that evoke powerful humanitarian concerns. Not the least of these is the situation in the home country, both as a factor provoking departure in the first instance and as a consideration in determining whether individuals can be required to return. The solution is not to exclude migration as an outcome altogether, but to emphasize the need to manage numbers and to reinforce the sovereign rights of governments to control entry across their frontiers. The argument here is that an internationally agreed mechanism, operating under acceptable humanitarian conditions, could be devised to handle the problem.

The model envisaged here would draw heavily on the procedures of the Comprehensive Plan of Action adopted by the international community to deal with the outflow from Viet Nam. It would similarly be structured to dovetail with the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol. Indeed, an important ancillary objective would of course be to protect and reinforce the authority of the Convention. This proposal assumes that migratory movements will include people who are fleeing persecution – that is to say, refugees; others will be the displaced who are fleeing war, civil disturbance and other man-made and natural disasters but not fleeing persecution or not necessarily seeking to migrate permanently. There is a case for establishing a distinctly separate mechanism for this latter group; in many respects their needs differ significantly from those of refugees. Such a mechanism might be enshrined as a protocol to the 1951 Convention and would emphasize temporary assistance and care and maintenance pending return.

A regime along these lines would clear the way for the evolution of an agreed approach in dealing with those who have no claim to interna-

tional protection. This mechanism would have to be internationally endorsed and be based on acceptable standards of human rights practice. It need not necessarily be linked to the Refugee Convention. Indeed, there may be good reasons why this should not be contemplated.

Philosophically, such a mechanism would be based around provisions that contemplate the safe return of those determined not to be refugees or displaced persons and who have no clear legal migration entitlements. It would enshrine the important human right of any individual to leave his country and to return. It would, however, reinforce the right of receiving countries to reject entry and to arrange the return of those rejected to their country of origin either under national or international arrangements.

The logic of this proposal would be to discourage the expectation of uncontrolled migration. In order to achieve control, governments may have to acknowledge that some of those involved will require acceptance on humanitarian and national interest grounds. A number of governments who have no formal migration programme other than their asylum procedures have recognized this need.

The successful achievement of return to their countries of origin of refugees, displaced persons and unsuccessful migrants may involve assistance to ensure reintegration. Unless conditions in the south improve, the uncontrolled outflows will continue – in ever increasing numbers.

The above is a proposal only. It is, however, a logical response to a growing problem, which may in the minds of many governments be already out of control. The choices are clear. Do we as an international community join together to provide an acceptable mechanism for handling this problem? Or is it to be left to individual countries or groups of countries to handle the problem as best they can? An internationally agreed approach can ensure the maintenance of humanitarian norms of treatment and deal with problems of return assistance in a co-ordinated manner. Again, it would be simplistic and unrealistic to see the resolution of this problem as being one of exclusion. This would ignore the devices of man.



# Little relief for Africa's exiles

*In almost every part of Africa, countries and communities which find it difficult to provide the basic needs of their own people are struggling to bear the burden imposed by hundreds and thousands of destitute new arrivals.*

*Since the beginning of the year, the number of refugees and returnees in Ethiopia has shot past the million mark, primarily as a result of the conflict in neighbouring Somalia. To the south of the continent, the violence in Mozambique has uprooted an even larger number of people, the vast majority of whom have settled in Malawi. In West Africa, a third of Liberia's 2.5 million citizens have been forced to seek sanctuary in neighbouring and nearby states.*

*Many of Africa's newest refugees have moved into remote and inaccessible areas, where relief programmes are difficult to organize. And with international attention focused on crises in other parts of the world, host countries and humanitarian organizations have found it difficult to mobilize the resources required to assist all of the people in need.*

*In many African countries, refugees have proved that they can make a useful contribution to the local economy. But their ability to live productive lives in exile has now been seriously curtailed. Confronted with shortages of food, inadequate supplies of water and a lack of medical care, their energies are concentrated on a much more fundamental objective: the daily battle to stay alive.*





## Ethiopia

# A critical situation

The number of refugees and returnees in Ethiopia has risen dramatically in recent weeks – up from around 800,000 at the beginning of the year to 1.2 million in mid-April. Our reporter visited the east and south-east of the country, where thousands of new arrivals have crossed the border from Somalia.

For years the blue bus had been operating in the northern Somali town of Boroma. Every day it covered the same route, and every day it carried hundreds of passengers. Then suddenly, in February of this year, the bus left Boroma and drove to Ethiopia.

In the middle of February tens of thousands of people crossed the border in buses and lorries. A whole city had taken flight – the 109,000 inhabitants of Boroma had suddenly arrived. They settled in Darwanaji, an Ethiopian border village with a population of only 500. Now Darwanaji is a refugee city. A gigantic new camp has been created from nothing.

The Somali exodus into Ethiopia started in mid-1988, when conflict broke out between government forces and the rebels of the Somali National Movement. Within a year,

more than 300,000 people had crossed the border. A second eruption of conflict at the end of 1990 unleashed a fresh wave of refugees. Since the middle of January around 150,000 have arrived, accompanied by some 200,000 Ethiopians who had themselves fled to Somalia in the 1970s and 1980s. They all live together in camps such as the one at Darwanaji.

The Somali refugees and Ethiopian returnees have arrived in a country where famine stalks the land. Seven years after the terrible emergency of 1984, Ethiopia, Somalia and other Sahelian countries are preparing for another period of starvation. In 1989 the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed more than 145,000 tonnes of foodstuffs to the refugees living in Ethiopia. This year the amount will be about 220,000 tonnes. This is equivalent to a 60 kilometre-long convoy of heavy lorries.

At least 700,000 uprooted Somalis and Ethiopians are now concentrated in seven camps in eastern Ethiopia. The first arrivals – those who left Somalia in 1988 – were mostly from the cities of Hargeisa and Burao, and included a substantial number of

educated and middle-class people. In 1989 that began to change. Since that time, many pastoralists and nomads have come to Ethiopia, giving rise to severe organizational problems. As they are constantly on the move, it is very difficult to organize proper health programmes. UNHCR's recent financial crisis has also had its effects in Ethiopia. New schools and clinics cannot be established. It became necessary to concentrate on the most urgent forms of health care.

Nevertheless, substantial progress has been made in the older camps. In particular, the health situation of the refugees has improved significantly. In the middle of 1989, 15 per cent of the Somali refugees were undernourished. By May 1990, this figure had fallen to 8.5 per cent.

But such progress should not be exaggerated. In many places, refugees still live in very precarious circumstances, suffering from respiratory infections, diarrhoea, skin diseases and inflammation of the eyes. The aid agencies are now trying to be more active in the field of prevention: looking after mothers and small children is a top priority.

One of the most important problems is that of water. In most of the refugee camps this precious commodity is in extremely short supply. UNHCR is currently shipping 800,000 litres of water a day from boreholes in Jijiga and in the Jerrera valley. But the extent of these water reserves is unknown, and in Jijiga, the water pressure in the wells is already beginning to drop. In the Aware camp, six earth dams have been built to store rainwater. In the Rabasso camp, a water purification installation has been set up. Similar initiatives are also planned in the Camaboker and Daror camps.

To get from Jijiga to the new Darwanaji camp, one has to cross several mountain ranges on bad roads. The carcasses of dead animals lie everywhere. "The drought has been terrible," says our local guide. But the week before we arrived it had rained, and some plants were already sprouting on the plain.

The spring is the period of short rains. The dykes have been filled up and the skinny cows, goats and sheep are drinking their fill. But these conditions will not last long, as it has not rained enough. In a few weeks, thirst and drought will be back again.



More than 220,000 tonnes of food will be distributed this year.





UNHCR/M. Amar

Hopes are now placed on the autumn. That is when the long rains come. But even if they are good, people will still starve. For it takes a year before the harvest can be gathered.

Jeeps clatter painfully down into the valley. Somalia is on the horizon and suddenly there is a giant village, hundreds of children coming running and shouting greetings to us. This is Darwanaji. But the happy and colourful reception conceals immense hardship and distress. The refugees' and returnees' round huts are like giant mushrooms, sprouting up from the land. They are built from branches and scraps of material. When the hot wind whistles across the plain, many of them collapse.

An old man is lying in front of a hut. "He's dead," say the children. Suddenly, however, he begins to move. A young man lifts the old one's head and tries to get him to eat something – unsuccessfully. His body has shrunk down to the ribs. In Somalia too, it has not rained properly for two years. There too, the crops have withered and starvation reigns.



UNHCR/M. Celame

*Even if the rains come back in the autumn, it will be a year before the harvest can be gathered.*

"The health of the new arrivals is miserable," says Fiona O'Reilly of Save the Children. Between 20 and 30 per cent of the children and old people are undernourished. In the Save the Children health clinic the babies are weighed. A nine month-old boy weighs four kilograms – half of what he should be. The refugees have dug a communal grave to which they bring the dead. "Every day about ten people die," says one agency worker.

Everything is lacking: water, food and shelter, as well as medical supplies. Around 400,000 litres of water are needed each day – four litres per person for drinking, cooking and washing. But in Darwanaji everyone gets only one litre a day. Transferred from tankers to a giant container, a single small jet of water has to make do for more than 100,000 people each day.

There are no water reserves. Every day the tankers fight their way over the wretched road to the refugee camp. Petrol is scarce. If the convoys were unable to run for just two or three days, tens of thousands



## Totally destitute

Mahmoud Hussein is now 23 years of age; he was not yet eight when he had to leave the village of Yareh in Ethiopia and take refuge in Somalia. He was accompanied at that time by his parents, who have since died. Now Mahmoud has had to return to Ethiopia with his only family – his pregnant wife Bariso and one year-old son. "Our second child will be born in Ethiopia, like me," says Mahmoud.

Mahmoud Hussein has spent most of his life in UNHCR refugee camps. While living in Somalia he learned English and became a nurse, a job he would now like to do in his rediscovered homeland. But at the moment, survival is the only thing on his mind.



UNHCR/H. Hug

Mahmoud and his wife have no possessions. Not even a receptacle for water or for cooking food. When grain is available, they eat with the neighbours. When it is not, they boil seeds which they have gathered from the trees, early in the morning, before the monkeys arrive to protect their food.

Over 15,000 people, most of whom are Ethiopian returnees, live in Arabi. Like Mahmoud, they are totally destitute. A stone's throw away, in one of the huts, we can hear the sound of a bad cough. "Tuberculosis," thinks Mahmoud. It is midday, 43 degrees in the shade of the hut. "Home," says Mahmoud. "We have come back. But we will never leave again."

MC

of people would begin to die of thirst.

Food is also a problem. Each refugee and returnee needs 500 grams a day. So, in the eastern part of the country alone, the aid agencies must provide 280 tonnes of foodstuffs a day. Some of these supplies come by train from Djibouti, but the line is often interrupted. The warehouses currently contain the bare minimum of reserves. "If emergency transport doesn't bring food here quickly," says John Buttery of Save the Children, "the people will begin to starve."

Many of the refugees are desperate. Hoping that it might speed up the delivery of assistance, they show us all the ill and undernourished people. They bring them out of the huts and keep on saying "photograph them": emaciated children with running sores, babies with matchstick legs and swollen stomachs, old people with gaunt features, their faces and bodies covered with hundreds of flies. In recent weeks, food and other relief items have been reaching the new arrivals on a regular basis, leading to an improvement in their condition. But the needs remain enormous.

Many of the refugees in eastern Ethiopia had previously said that they wanted to return home. But the instability and conflict which continues in Somalia means that they cannot count on any assistance there. No international agency can today guarantee that people returning to Somalia will have enough to eat.

In south-eastern Ethiopia, deep in the Ogaden, the situation is even more dramatic. The refugees and returnees arrive in groups, travelling on foot through the scorching desert. From Burukur, the last village in Somalia, to Kelafo in Ethiopia it is 125 kilometres. "We covered the distance in eight days and eight nights," says a Somali teacher. "Many old people died during the march. We left the dead lying on the ground. We were too weak to bury them."

The aid agencies believe that the refugees could stay here for months or even years. Nobody expects the problems in Somalia to be resolved overnight. "We have to assume," says a UNHCR staff member in Jijiga, "that the refugees will remain here a very long time."

HEINER HUG

## Breaking down the silence

The fierce fighting in Somalia has led to a sharp increase in the numbers of Ethiopians returning to their homeland, people who had found asylum in Somalia during the Ogaden war in the late 1970s. Arriving in terrible conditions, they nevertheless nourish the hope that they will be able to settle down at home. A journalist with Swiss TV reports.

Kelafo is a village in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. In the central square, dozens of people are crowded under each tree, sheltering in the shade. A strange silence reigns all around.

Since last January, Kelafo has accommodated several thousand Ethiopian returnees from Somalia. Hundreds of them are sitting there, too weak to move. Nearby, we see a group of men, motionless but awake. Further on, there are two women and three babies. Each of the mothers is holding a baby in her arms. The third baby is lying on a mat. Tiny and wrinkled, she is two months old. An orphan of the war in Somalia.

A few steps away there are more women and children. They are not playing. Not a cry nor a laugh. Some of them have hair which has turned white because of malnutrition. They try to get up; but they can't stay upright for long. Their legs are too weak. Every day, children are dying in Kelafo. In silence.

Until the end of 1990, Kelafo was a tranquil village like many others. UNHCR had planned to build a reception centre there as part of its programme of voluntary repatriation for Ethiopian refugees in Somalia. But events suddenly took over. In just 15 days, several tens of thousands of people poured into Kelafo. The population increased by a factor of ten. Every day and every night more arrived. They are still flowing in.





More and more people...



...to share fewer and fewer resources.



"The world has to wake up to what is happening here."

This morning the local authorities are making a register. Long queues have formed. Women carry blue food ration cards round their necks, which they received in the Somali refugee camps. It is often the only document that identifies them when they return to their home country.

Everything has happened so quickly that they now have to face a situation that is much more difficult than they experienced during their years of exile. It is easy to understand why when one realizes that within the space of a few weeks Ethiopia has had to cope with a huge wave of returnees – more than 200,000 of them since January.

It is an acute emergency. For Benedict Akinola, who runs the UNHCR office in Dire Dawa, the very first priority is to provide food for the new arrivals as quickly as possible. "Antibiotics are no good on an empty stomach," he points out. "But the medical needs are huge too, and far from being covered." Everything is lacking, even the most vitally needed medicines. Children die every day of diseases that could easily be cured, such as diarrhoea or colds.

Water is also a cause for grave concern. There is no filtration system or sanitary equipment in these camps and villages where, in some cases, thousands of people have crowded together in the space of a few days. The polluted water is a vector for many diseases – when it is there at all.

Quite obviously, the local resources aren't enough to meet the needs of so many new arrivals. The region is poor and has been hit by drought for the last two years. The resources there are much too sparse – like the herds of animals which return slowly to Kelafo each evening at sunset.

Amid the desert dust these animals, emaciated, have hollows between each of their ribs. The bones on their hindquarters stick out so sharply that they inevitably remind one of the carcasses that lie beside the roads. Here the drought has brought the vultures a feast. In the distance, thin columns of sand twisted by the wind move across the land, drying up any remaining pasture. The cattle cannot find anywhere else to graze. Famine is not far off.

When the returnees arrived, the burden had to be shared. In Kelafo each head of family now has to feed



five or six extra people. But not everybody has been lucky enough to find their relatives. On the outskirts of the village there is a vast temporary camp. It shelters some 6,000 people who could not be taken in by the inhabitants of the village. Those are the worst off of all. For them, the issue of survival comes up afresh each day. They have to try to survive until they can get home to their native region and settle there permanently. It is a hope which is actively encouraged by UNHCR.

To help the returnees achieve their goal, UNHCR has given each head of household a small sum of money: 200 birr (around US\$ 100), plus 100 birr for dependents. The people's flight was so rapid that many were simply not able to bring anything with them. The cash sum is intended to cover the costs of their journey. It also means that the returnees will be able to buy one or two essential things: cooking utensils or even a few tools.

In Kelafo a block of abandoned huts shows that this policy has already begun to produce results. After a few day's rest, some returnees have moved on again, heading for their home villages. In this area, the sound of a motor engine on the road is still something of an event.

But the trucks which move off carrying returnees and their scanty luggage, are still too few and far between. The fuel shortage, aggravated by the effects of the war in the Persian Gulf, is becoming desperate. In these conditions it is difficult to organize road transport. And the distances to be covered are very great.

The refugees and returnees have poured in all along the Ethiopian frontier, in both the west and south of the country, into very inaccessible regions. It takes five days to get from the capital of Addis Ababa to the southern Ogaden. In some places the tracks are so rough that out of every ten trucks that start out, half will suffer repairable damage. Two more will never come back, having been eaten up by the road and completely written off.

Bargoun is one of these villages which it is so difficult to reach. Here, with his four month-old baby in his arms, a father waits for the next convoy to arrive. He is a widower, as his wife did not survive the journey. To

feed his three children today, he has only three biscuits distributed by a local aid organization. Salem speaks English. He once worked for a voluntary agency in a UNHCR refugee camp in Somalia. He is the person who acts as a guide, showing us the village and its new inhabitants.

Here, too, there is a young girl who is sick. Her neighbours have a baby; its skin is wrinkled, its stomach distended. A little further on two old men are sitting, frighteningly emaciated. They are cradled by young people. Their eyes are closed. And always, everywhere, there is this silence.

According to our guide, "during the first few days I too remained silent, saying nothing at all. I sat on the ground, exhausted, convinced that we couldn't possibly go any further." "But now," he continues, "I've plucked up my courage. I think we shall soon be able to set off

**M**any of the refugees in Africa would be able to return home if we were able to assist them. We do not have the right to refuse them this help.

afresh, to settle down again at home, in the place where I come from."

Salem takes us through the huts which have been occupied by the new arrivals, so that we can film. Like many Ethiopian refugees, he has already seen several television crews during his long years in exile. He knows that our cameras will explain to our people back home the dramatic conditions in which the returnees are living. He says to us, "you must tell people about what is happening here." Then, taking us aside, he asks: "do you think there is still time to film us? You know, things must be done quickly."

A few days later we are to hear the same thing from another refugee. And yet again from the UNHCR representative in Ethiopia. Diplomatic language is no longer possible. "We can't just let these people die in front of our eyes for lack of the resources to help them," says Cecil Kpenou. "The world has to wake up to what is happening here."

He describes the situation of more than 1.2 million returnees and refugees in Ethiopia as an "absolute emergency." It is true that the returnees' homecoming was foreseen. But last year the voluntary repatriation programme had to be delayed for lack of funds.

"Since then, the massive wave of returnees has created a huge need for assistance, which we can only partly meet. We don't have the necessary resources," continues Cecil Kpenou. "These resources must be acquired very, very rapidly. It's a matter of life and death for thousands of people here."

At the beginning of March, UNHCR launched an emergency appeal for US\$ 41 million, to meet the immediate needs of the new arrivals and to help the returnees to resettle in their home districts. But by the end of April, donors had pledged only US\$ 11.3 million.

In Godé too, the capital of the Ogaden, returnees are waiting. They came here last autumn and built their huts in this desert region. They came because they wanted to return home, long before the fighting in Somalia forced hundreds of thousands to return in panic. The returnees here were brought across the border six months ago. Now disaster has struck them. They have no means of returning to their homes. As in the other camps, everything or nearly everything is lacking: food, water, medical care.

Practically nothing remains of the huts that they put up when they arrived. The wind has worn or torn away the canvas and rags used to cover them. It blows through the branches. And every gust brings with it the smell of dead animals. Here too, amongst thousands of people, our microphones record a silence which is interrupted only by the sound of the blowing wind – and the voice of the UNHCR representative.

He too refers to the silence, saying that it must be broken down. "In Africa today," he says, "there are emergencies everywhere. The continent now has more than five million refugees. Very many of them would be able to return home if we were able to assist them. We do not have the right to refuse them this assistance."

MIREILLE CALAME



*"Six hundred thousand of the 800,000 inhabitants in the Ogaden are already suffering from the effects of the drought." Bashir Sheik Abdi, the provincial administrator, does not mask his concern. His eyes harden behind his dark glasses as he remembers the great drought and famine of 1984 and 1985, fearing that the months to come will prove just as catastrophic for the local population.*

*"In Godé and the surrounding areas, it has not rained in two years. We should be in the midst of the 'small' rains," he continues. "Everything is parched, the crops have not been planted and the granaries are empty. If it does not rain within the next fortnight, once more, nothing will grow."*

*The 'small' rains last only until the end of April. As to the more abundant rains in the summer months, they have not fallen in Ogaden since 1989. Bashir Sheik Abdi is very worried because he believes that the coming crisis could be even worse than in 1984.*

*"At the time," he says, "we had tankers to carry the water. We also had convoys of foodstuffs. But today, practically all road transport is paralyzed. Furthermore," he goes on, "in 1984 we did not have the same influx. The returnees who have arrived are mostly destitute, exhausted, starving. We host them as best we can. In Godé, all the houses are full. I went back to my family home recently and there was no place for me: 11 other people were staying there. There is a lot of talk about traditional African hospitality," he says, smiling, "But hospitality is not enough when there is nothing to share."*

*Some foreign visitors have arrived to assess the local needs. Pleasant-mannered, bright-eyed, slow-moving, the provincial administrator asks them to take a seat. "Just like 1984," he says with a touch of bitter irony. Above his head the blades of a large fan stir the silence and the dry air of the encroaching desert.*

*Through the window we can see about 30 people, mostly women, with a few children and three elderly men—returnees who have just arrived. They have dropped their bundles in front of the door and sat down. Now they have to wait until their names are registered.*

MC

## Nothing left to share





# Victims of violence



With armed conflict forcing millions of Africans to flee their homes, academics and aid agencies are reaching tough conclusions about the changing nature of war in Africa. They have warned that the scale and scope of Africa's recent wars has put them beyond the control of governments or global institutions, requiring a reassessment of international humanitarian law and the strategies used to assist the victims of conflict.

There are fears that before the end of the century, the vicious circle of environmental degradation, climate change, economic crisis, resource shortages, population pressure, political fragmentation and the supply of cheap weaponry will mean many more wars in Africa, generating new waves of refugees and displaced people.

Among those analysing these issues is Mark Duffield, a British academic and former field director in Sudan for the voluntary agency Oxfam. In a report commissioned by that organization, he argues that until quite recent times, conflict in Africa was in essence a political process, with clear if unstated rules of behaviour. These clashes produced relatively few fatalities, and allowed pastoralists and subsistence farmers to resolve disputes over access to resources such as grazing land or water.

But under the pressure of economic development, population growth, the expansion of commercial land ownership and environmental decline, subsistence farming has faced a growing crisis. In the Sahel, the commercialization of agriculture and the effects of drought have prompted pastoralists to move south into farming areas, where they have come into conflict with the existing population. With the increasing availability of cheap arms, Duffield argues, conflict, "rather than being a means of adjustment, has become a widespread source of instability and

a destroyer of traditional ways of life."

Duffield argues that local disputes can easily escalate into larger internal conflicts, which can in turn become proxy wars for international powers. Political linkages flow up and arms flow down. And once they reach the local context, the ferocious destruction of modern weaponry overwhelms any moderating influences. Conflict in Africa has become synonymous with gross violations of human rights and deliberate attempts to destroy the assets and way of life of local groups. And when food aid is available to assist affected populations, it too is used as a weapon of war. Rebel movements are equally prone to exploit humanitarian assistance in this way.

Highlighting the recent violence in Liberia and Somalia as well as the durability of old conflicts in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Angola, Duffield argues that commentators have neglected the ethnic content of African conflicts, because they are embarrassed by the spectre of tribalism. Dispelling another myth, he points out that although armed groups in Africa frequently use the rhetoric of national liberation, guerrilla movements can thrive without the support of local people. A good example is to be found in Mozambique, where Renamo rebels have used terrorism, rather than a political programme or ideology, to destabilize the Frelimo government.

Conflict's most visible consequence, Duffield writes, is the mass



UNHCR/L. Auerbach



displacement of people, whose loss of livelihood and assets makes them particularly vulnerable to food denial and human rights abuses. Many of Africa's uprooted people remain in their own country, and therefore do not fall within UNHCR's mandate. And even with regard to refugees, he points out, the financial crisis currently facing UNHCR makes it difficult for the organization to undertake its responsibilities.

The need to reassess many aspects of Africa's crisis and the international response to it, was a constant theme of a recent seminar in France, hosted by the International Committee of the Red Cross. With participants from UN agencies and voluntary organizations, the seminar highlighted how, without real planning, Africa's economic decline has led humanitarian bodies to take on the social welfare tasks traditionally undertaken by governments.

Several speakers emphasized the near impossibility of using international humanitarian law to protect civilians, when civil war has put in-

creasing numbers of people beyond the reach of governments. In many situations, rebel groups – and sometimes governments – have prevented humanitarian agencies from delivering assistance.

In their conclusions, the seminar participants repeated a point raised by the Duffield report: that military action in Africa is increasingly designed to destroy the livelihood of civilian populations. "Humanitarian assistance is no longer perceived as neutral by the warring parties," they observed. Underlining the need for long-term measures to assist the victims of Africa's conflicts, it was agreed that "the objective of humanitarian action is not merely to keep people alive but to keep them alive for a future. Namely, to secure sustainable livelihoods."

Africa's lack of sustainable development and the link between conflict and environmental degradation is the subject of 'Greenwar', a new book from the Panos Institute, which draws together the reporting of writers, researchers and academics from

the Sahel states. They argue that African governments have encouraged the development of commercial agriculture, but have failed to concentrate on environmental conservation and the equitable distribution of resources. Social and political tension has risen as a result, with costly military action being used to suppress dissent.

"The cycle of impoverishment is repetitive and truly vicious," the book concludes. Environmental degradation, impoverishment, increasing conflict over resources, the marginalization of rural people, mass displacement and uncontrolled migration leads to further conflict and the outbreak of wars within and between states. "When hostilities grow into organized warfare, the environment inevitably undergoes further degradation. This insidious pattern comes full circle, as a peacetime population and the government struggle to cope with a land left environmentally bankrupt. The seeds are sown for further tension and conflict."

NICK CATER



*Mozambicans crossing a bridge which has been destroyed by Renamo rebels.*



*Somalia***Suffering and betrayal in Mogadishu**

© J. Thoenen/CAT

While UNHCR assists the thousands of Somalis who have crossed the border into Ethiopia, a number of voluntary agencies are struggling to provide relief in the Somali capital. *Financial Times* journalist Julian Ozanne reports.

Mogadishu has been devastated by the war, particularly the heavy tank and artillery shelling unleashed indiscriminately in January. Few buildings remain unmarked by bullet or grenade fire. Almost every home and factory has been gutted in an orgy of looting.

The Mogadishu abattoir recently constructed with Italian aid money has been disembowelled. Cables were ripped out, walls and corrugated iron sheets torn down and useless hunks of metal machinery carried off

by looters. Food, fuel, drugs and water are extremely scarce.

Fears of an outbreak of cholera, measles and malaria epidemics are rising with the approach of the rains later this month. "The world has put a humanitarian embargo on us," says Nurelmi Osman, the acting Health Minister. "We are asking for food and drugs, not guns, for tents, not tanks. People are suffering. It will be a disaster."

**Worst of the war**

Willie Huber, an indefatigable humanitarian who works for the international aid organization SOS, lived through the worst of the war as other relief workers fled the war-torn city. He gathered several hundred Somalis together in the SOS compounds.

"I said if we stayed together we could protect each other. After that I couldn't leave. To do so would have been a crazy betrayal."

Mr Huber is now in charge of the only regular relief flights coming into the country, a Belgian Hercules C-130 which flies into Mogadishu five times a week with 18 tons of food, fuel and medical supplies which SOS distributes across the city. But he is fighting a battle to get funding from the European Community to keep the lifeline open. And he despairs about the absence of basic assistance for the thousands of people on the brink of death. As the international community stands by and Somalia plunges deeper into disaster, a feeling of helplessness is mounting in Mogadishu.



## Getting back to the land

In little more than a year, more than 700,000 Liberians have fled to neighbouring and nearby states, while a similar number have been displaced within their own country. In 1990, the European Community (EC) provided more than 20 million Ecus (US\$ 24.5 million) in relief to these uprooted people. In this article, a member of the EC's food aid unit stresses the importance of adapting emergency relief programmes to the local social and economic environment.

At first sight, there is nothing unusual about Zimmi in Sierra Leone or Yomou in Guinea or Tabou in Côte d'Ivoire. There are lots of people about, certainly, and plenty going on, but you don't know who are refugees – they look very like the locals – until you ask who comes from Liberia.

This is quite unlike the sorry refugee situations that are so frequent in other parts of the world. For in this case, the three host countries and their people go out of their way to avoid putting refugees in camps. Liberian refugees are housed in existing dwellings. They come from various regions along the Liberian frontier and they are housed in homes and settled in districts and villages according to their ethnic and family origin.

In Sierra Leone and Guinea, peasants – the bulk of the refugee population – have the opportunity to rent land temporarily, while in Côte d'Ivoire, some refugees from Tabou work on the oil palm plantations and others on the land, helping their hosts grow and harvest crops. Small Liberian businesses have sprung up all over the town of Nzérékoré in Guinea.

The new arrival will ultimately notice some odd things nonetheless – a crowd of new refugees registering before they are settled in the Ivorian town of Danané, for example, an impressive number of Liberian-registered taxis in Nzérékoré and groups of people with transistors pressed to their ears, tuning in to news on the Liberian situation. And above all, not just houses going up in the Guinean border towns of Gbaa and Thuo, but canvas shelters and tents as well.

Even with the best of intentions, it is not possible to go on housing new arrivals in existing accommodation. There comes a time when new dwellings are needed to cope with the continual influx of people, and, until proper houses can be built, tents are inevitable.

A significant feature of the food aid provided to refugees in this region is that various partners are involved, with, above all, the host populations shouldering responsibility for looking after and distributing the relief. In Côte d'Ivoire especially, the Red Cross has set up an exemplary delivery and distribution system, which fully involves the host populations and gives responsibility to the heads of villages and communities. Ivorian Red Cross officials drop off sacks of food from trucks at the entrance to the villages and districts between Danané and the distribution sites, and the villagers then take over storage of the products and organize distribution to the refugees – under the responsibility of the village chief and the refugees' representative.

Villagers and refugees know exactly what rations are to be distributed and what products are available – to the point where villagers are sometimes heard to complain, not about the aid handed out to refugees in their villages, but about not yet having received products already

supplied somewhere else. The host communities' involvement and responsibilities have precluded the need for ration cards – and prevented the abuse that goes with them. When food is distributed, the villagers and the refugees are able to see



*An exemplary distribution system has been established.*







UNHCR/J. Crip

*The host regions are rich in natural resources.*

for themselves exactly who needs how much of what.

The host regions are rich in natural resources and agricultural potential, and all three countries have made an effort to encourage the production of particular products, especially rice and palm oil, with encouraging results. Assistance has to take these long-term efforts into account and should in no way counter them. For ultimately, both locals and refugees will suffer from schemes which take no notice of the economic environment in which they are run.

## Harvest

Between harvests, after all the local resources have been distributed, food imports are justified. But, later on, it would be extremely dangerous to import massive amounts of rice and palm oil to areas which produce them, particularly at harvest time when there are supplies on the local market. Local supplies must be found wherever possible. The World Food Programme, for example, bought palm oil with European Community funds in Côte d'Ivoire and the Community recommended local rice purchasing in the forests of Guinea so as to sustain prices when a record paddy harvest was announced.

Local purchasing schemes should be encouraged, but geared to the particular country or region and to the particular product. There is no point in sending prices sky-high or

creating distortions on the market. The idea should be to keep them at a level which will encourage the producers to go on producing. In the long run, with local purchasing making for greater regularity of distribution, the host population will benefit as much as the refugees.

More than ever before, the food aid provided for the Liberian refugees should be integrated into the environment. The principle of food aid, to encourage the drive for self sufficiency in food, comes into its own here. Relief should be designed in the short and the medium term with a view to food security in the long term. It should make the refugees not dependent, but self sufficient in food, in the same way as the host population and the neighbours – which is why local production and local and regional trade have to be taken into account.

Some of the Liberians will stay in the host countries, and production in the rural areas where they have settled must be encouraged if they are to integrate properly. Assistance for the host populations, who have been so generous, does not necessarily have to be in the form of food aid, and could well involve encouraging them to find outlets for their own production. Farm tools and seeds could be distributed to locals and refugees alike and roads maintained – a series of schemes outside the framework of food aid but allied to it in being development-related.

ELISABETH TISON

## Malawi

# Solitary children

The massive population of Mozambican refugees in Malawi – around 925,000 at the last count – includes a significant number of vulnerable children. Traumatized, under-nourished and often without parents, they need special care if they are to survive and develop. In this article, we describe three typical cases.

Wakening noises drift through Kunyinda camp in south-west Malawi. The sun promises punishing heat, but the air is still moist. The dust will rise as the day advances, lending a shimmering, sepia quality to the thatched roofs and miniature maize plots of the camp.

The water-holes are already bustling with Mozambican refugee women and their children, intent on an early start to the day's tasks. A naked child treads purposefully and unheeded through the morning crowd. His solitary trek will take him to a feeding centre at the other end of the camp where Maria, a Malawian district health worker, will ensure that he gets food, milk, a quiet corner to sleep in and some warm if hurried caresses. Miguel is one of Maria's charges, a desperate and seemingly lost case whom she nursed back to life through the centre's therapeutic feeding programme.

While he could pass for a two or three year old, Miguel is in fact four and a half. His short legs are a sturdy support for a malformed spine which thrusts his tummy forward. He is naked because the shorts and jersey which a social worker gave him last year simply disappeared. Now without clothes, he is at least safe from ambush by people who might try to steal them.

An orphan taken in by his dead mother's sister, Miguel is considered to be in the care of adults who, by local custom, have the responsibility for his upbringing. But his aunt could not cope with his survival as a baby, and she cannot cope with his devel-



opment now. His name is on the family ration card and so they do not want to give him up. But every morning at daybreak, Miguel crosses the camp to the feeding centre which has become his home, and every evening at nightfall he returns to the family hut to sleep.

As Miguel's aunt explains, it is not easy to cope with a vulnerable child in a camp like Kunyinda. The first phase of the therapeutic feeding programme involves a period of intensive care, during which mothers and infants live inside the centre. But it was impossible for her to leave her own children or neglect her crushing daily workload. So she simply gave Miguel to the centre. He remained there through the second phase of the programme, which requires daily visits to the centre by the mother and child.

By the time Miguel was healthy enough for the weekly visits of phase three, no real bonding had occurred between him and his extended family. While accepting the traditional obligation to house Miguel, his uncle was clear in his detachment from any commitment to care for or discipline him, leaving these responsibilities to his already overburdened aunt.

Children such as Miguel – uprooted in more than one sense – have a bad reputation in the camps. They are considered disobedient, unruly, untrustworthy. Without appropriate support or guidance, their foster families may not have the time, the means or the incentive to encourage their mental, physical and emotional growth. Without early identification and follow-up, these children become living proof of the fact that while the extended family can often provide the needs of refugee children who have lost their parents, it cannot be viewed as a catch-all solution.

Their story is a common one. Five children – three brothers and two sisters, aged 8 to 17 – arrived in Kunyinda in November 1990. Alone. As they understand it, their father died of witchcraft. Their mother's death is less abstract. In fact it is vivid in all their minds. She died in a mine explosion as they were fleeing from their home.

The children ran into some Renamo rebels and were forced to carry arms and supplies for them, moving constantly around the country. At an abandoned village, they were put to

work in the fields. At the first opportunity, they ran away together. They fled for two days, keeping within sight of a large contingent of refugees heading towards Malawi.

After registering in the camp, an aunt of the children was traced, and a reunion was arranged by a female refugee leader. But within a month, it had become obvious that this arrangement was not working. It was then decided to give the 17 year-old his own ration card, recognizing him as the head of the family of five, independent of their relatives.

Finding a good site and building a shelter are daunting tasks for any adult refugee in Malawi. Poles are usually provided by UNHCR to discourage dangerous forays into Mozambique, but thatch, mud and other

prevented all five youngsters from going to school, registering for vocational training or enjoying any kind of recreation.

The recognition by refugee leaders and aid agencies of the need to preserve family unity is commendable. But the life of the five brothers and sisters is now suspended in a grinding routine. What is the best way to assist them? Should they remain on their own, be moved in with another foster family, or be placed in a communal setting where adults could help provide their basic needs, leaving them to attend school and to gain some useful skills?

Who can say why some families fall apart? Why traditional coping mechanisms in the face of trauma, loss and grief can repair and heal in



*Family structures sometimes fall apart, particularly in the unnatural surroundings of a refugee camp.*

building material must be sought out, carried and built into a hut. For five unaccompanied children, this was an awesome undertaking.

Today, their two half-finished dwellings are to be found on a barren hillside, rejected by other refugees as too exposed and too steep to host a maize or garden plot. The task of building and maintaining these huts, obtaining cooking utensils, fuel, food and water, doing piecework or seasonal jobs when possible and dealing with daily survival problems, have

some cases and aggravate the damage in others?

In Monika's family, everyone talked, even joked, about her nightmares. She usually cried out in the early morning and woke her parents, her 14 year-old brother, her newly-married sister and brother-in-law. Her dreams were about a pre-dawn, terror-ridden flight as a ring of fire and shooting closed around their village. When they first arrived in Chiumbangame camp two years ago, Monika, then seven, refused to go to



school or even to leave the family plot.

Encouraged by social workers, the children and parents talked out their emotional problems and got on with the business of living. Monika's nightmares began to fade; she was getting better, and stronger. The whole family seemed to be recovering. It was just as well. For even in the relative safety of the camp, their trauma wasn't over.

## Abducted

Many refugees – men, women and children – cross back into the bordering Mozambican provinces to cultivate land, fetch thatch and firewood, and seek information about relatives. One day Monika's mother went across, was seen wandering through the fields, and never came back. Had she been abducted? Killed? Or for some unknown reason, had she abandoned her family? Today, a year later, there are still no answers.

Monika's nightmares and morning cries have returned. Her father is now living with another woman inside the camp who is expecting his child. Neither she nor her 15 year-old brother, formerly an eager student, are going to school, and the latter prefers to stay with a group of youths rather than his family.

The family support system, intact upon arrival in Malawi, appears to have disintegrated beyond repair. Local custom will ensure that Monika's material needs are met. She will continue to live with her older sister and brother-in-law who are expecting their first child. But local custom could also decide the direction of her life – in all likelihood as her brother-in-law's second wife.

The consequences of such a pre-determined existence are evident in refugee camps and settlements throughout Malawi: early and successive pregnancies, adult female illiteracy, the inability to participate in education or training programmes, and total dependence on a male companion for access to assistance. The ominous tendency of refugee men to take increasingly younger female companions as a protection against AIDS makes Monika particularly vulnerable.

JEANNE MENNING

# Crisis in the Sahel



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**Growing hunger across the Sahel is forcing thousands of people to move in search of food, forage and work, according to the United Nations, international aid agencies and the major famine early warning systems.**

From Chad to Mauritania, grain stocks and food supplies are dwindling. Traditional famine coping mechanisms, including migration, have accelerated and spread after two years of bad harvests. Aid agencies and climatologists have warned that if the 1991 rains, due in the next few months, are inadequate, it could have a tragic impact across the Sahel, with millions displaced from famine zones, as they were during the drought of 1984/85.

In Chad, where the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates the current harvest is the worst since 1984/85, population movements were already under way early this year, according to the N'Djamena office of the agency CARE. The Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) of the US Agency for International Development has reported depopulated areas in the zone above 15 degrees north and villages abandoned by populations leaving for larger towns near the Sudanese border, where camps of displaced people have already begun to grow. Drought-

afflicted Chadians have also crossed the border into northern Cameroon, prompting WFP appeals for 18,000 tonnes of food aid for 190,000 displaced persons.

In Niger, the government has said that 1.8 million people are at risk, prompting the release of sorghum from national security stocks and food-for-work projects in an attempt to stave off mass migrations. But a mission by the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies found that food supplies from last October's harvest were exhausted in the Diffa department in east Niger, where both farmers and nomads were migrating to neighbouring towns and into northern Nigeria to find work.

## Food shortfalls

Burkina Faso is facing extensive food shortfalls in the northern and central provinces of Bam, Passore, Sanmatenga, Soum and Yatenga. Agencies report abandoned villages as populations move south to look for work in urban areas and in local mines, where tough conditions are the norm. Mali's food situation, though less severe at the national level than in neighbouring countries, shows acute local difficulties. Save the Children Fund's Bamako office has reported unusually early migrations of pastoralists with their herds



from the Tombouctou and Gao regions into Mopti. National security stocks have been released to stabilize prices, leaving little in reserve for 1992 should the harvest fail this year.

Adam Thiam, a Malian working for the agency ACORD, warns that livestock losses in previous years could keep people from moving. He says that "the mass migrations in Mali of 1984/85 were mainly in search of grazing for cattle. Although food shortages in 1991 could be as bad as in 1984/85, cattle numbers have not recovered and the mass exodus from affected areas is unlikely to be repeated."

Mauritania has joined the list of countries suffering food shortfalls

and has requested 100,000 tonnes of food aid to assist more than one million affected people, particularly in the northern regions of Tagant, Inchiri and Adrar. High malnutrition rates have already been reported around the town of Tichit in Tagant.

### Pledges

Gary Eilerts, a senior FEWS official, warns that pledges of international food aid to meet emergency needs are low, and actual deliveries of food could be very late. He expects that barely 15,000 tonnes of food will reach Niger before August or September. By then, Chad will have received only 10,000 tonnes. For western Sahel, he predicts a cri-

sis of similar proportions to the one which has already struck Sudan and Ethiopia should the rains fail once again this year. He also fears this could lead to mass population movements.

In March, with months to go before any rains in most Sahelian countries, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) assessed food aid requirements for the region at nearly 400,000 tonnes for well over four million people. With many poor farmers and nomads already extremely vulnerable, some aid agencies are concerned such numbers will rise fast unless swift action is taken to deliver food in time.

NICK CATER



UNHCR/S. Errington

### *Sudan: refugees and relief*

*Over the past 20 years, Sudan has been confronted with a series of refugee influxes from Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda and Zaire. The country now has a refugee population of over 750,000. Like the other Sahelian states, Sudan is today confronted with an emergency of its own. According to a recent UN report, severe malnutrition is widespread in the south and west of the country, and a huge international aid effort is needed to save the lives of up to nine million people.*



# The League in Africa

**Trademarks of humanity amidst tragedy, the familiar Red Cross and Red Crescent symbols seen on tents and trucks across Africa signal that the continent and its refugees are high priorities for the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (LRCS). A Geneva-based umbrella organization with national groups in 147 countries and 250 million volunteer members, the LRCS is the largest non-governmental organization in the world.**

With its focus on disasters – from preparedness to relief and rehabilitation – the League acts as a catalyst and co-ordinator, channelling resources from its own societies and other donors in the industrialized world to Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the less-developed countries.

In 1990, the League's 35 disaster appeals totalled around US\$ 77 million, of which US\$ 42 million was for Africa. Much of this amount was requested to help with food needs and population movements in countries such as Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique and Sudan. But with worsening drought and conflict in several parts of the continent, by mid-March this year the League had already launched appeals for almost US\$ 68 million in cash, equipment, food and medicines for Africa.

In addition to providing money and material resources in emergency situations, the League can send staff – known as 'delegates' – from national societies. They have Red Cross training and specific skills in areas such as logistics or water engineering, and can be sent at short notice to assist in disasters. But even with 90 delegates now working in Africa, the League's wider aim is always to build up the capabilities of national societies, backed by small regional offices in Nairobi, Abidjan and Harare.

Half of the League's 1991 US\$ 42.5 million appeal for development funds will be earmarked for longer term projects to be undertaken by Red Cross societies in 33 African countries. Such projects cover everything from blood donation, first aid training and AIDS advice to primary

health care, disaster preparedness and special programmes for women and youth.

Ibrahim Osman, head of the League's 11-strong Africa department, is proud of the progress achieved in recent years. "In the crisis of 1984/85 there were more than 80 League delegates in Sudan alone," he says. "Today there are not more than eight in that country, because the Sudanese Red Crescent has the capacity to do the majority of the work itself." "We have some very capable societies in Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and in southern Africa, though we still have work to do in areas such as francophone West Africa," Osman adds. The movement continues to expand in Africa, with new national societies expected in Namibia and the Comoros Islands.

According to Ibrahim Osman, although the League's aim is to develop the organizational capacities of national societies, it won't be doing itself out of a job so soon. Today's needs in Africa are mainly for technical assistance, tomorrow's will be to help societies improve management, finance, administration and even fund-raising. "I'd like to see a situation where national societies could cover their basic costs as they grow. Then we could work with them to identify sources of national and international funds in their countries which can be immediately approached in times of emergency."

Despite its many problems, Ethiopia is a good example of a country where the Red Cross is determined to pay its way. One of Africa's largest national societies, the Ethiopian Red Cross has 1,000 staff, a million paying members and 45,000 volunteers. It undertakes an enormous range of work, from complex famine relief programmes to first aid and tree planting.

Its president, Dr Dawit Zawde, says that "Ethiopia has a bright future and the Red Cross is part of that. I wish we were less dependent on external funding, and I want membership to account for a much greater percentage of our budget very soon. We simply can't go on being so heavily dependent on outside



UNHCR/J. Hartley





resources because those resources may not always be there. We are examining fund-raising projects that we can undertake within Ethiopia."

In helping refugees and displaced people, the League and UNHCR have built up a close working relationship in many parts of Africa. In Malawi, for example, the national Red Cross society has been given responsibility for the distribution of food to over 900,000 Mozambicans who have taken refuge from the conflict in their country. Every fortnight, 1,500 Red Cross staff and volunteers in 130 centres distribute rations of grain, edible oil, sugar, beans and other items, shifting 140,000 tonnes of food every year.

The national societies of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone are also co-operating with UNHCR and the League in distributing food to 700,000 Liberian refugees. Elsewhere, 300,000 people displaced by conflict in Ethiopia and 50,000 in southern Sudan have been targeted for relief in the last two years. Both countries have already been the subjects of large appeals this year.

The League sees strength in its unique structure – a global federation of locally-run national groups, which act as auxiliaries to public authorities while retaining the legitimacy which comes from their independent status. The individual Red Cross or Red Crescent society may be small and possess very limited funds or staff. Sometimes it is the

only or almost the only indigenous agency of its type in a country. But it can call for assistance from the resources of the entire movement and the experience of 700 appeals in 150 countries over the last 70 years.

Looking to the future, the League expects major new challenges, particularly in its work for refugees and displaced people. Senior LRCS official Stephen Davey believes that there will be a growing number of mass migrations in Africa, as a result of economic deprivation, environmental degradation, and the collapse of existing political and social structures. "It is vital to do more in identifying and acting on the neglected needs of refugees, including psychosocial needs, and in identifying and using their skills." Commenting on the growing number of internally displaced people in Africa, Davey says that "the most important need to be addressed is not the services to be provided, but the critical issue of ensuring access to them within their strife-torn countries."

As far as the League itself is concerned, Davey explains that greater research and policy development is required if the organization is to identify and respond to the needs of Africa's most vulnerable people. "We must take on the long, hard challenge of harnessing the enormous potential of our national societies in countries afflicted by political, economic and social crisis."

NICK CATER



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# A question of resources

**E.A. Azikiwe is Nigeria's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva and Chairman of UNHCR's Executive Committee. He talked to us about the challenges confronting the organization and the refugee situation in Africa.**

**REFUGEES:** You became Chairman of UNHCR's Executive Committee at a critical moment in the organization's history. How do you assess the current state of affairs?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** As you have suggested, UNHCR is going through a very difficult period. During the Executive Committee meeting last October, we heard that the number of refugees in the world had risen to around 15 million. But I'm afraid that as a result of the Gulf crisis, the number is now much higher than that.

UNHCR is a global organization, with the responsibility of protecting and assisting refugees in every part of the world. And in every part of the world, new refugee movements are taking place. This has put an enormous strain on UNHCR's resources. Last year we had a shortfall of about US\$ 38 million. The former High Commissioner, Mr Stoltenberg, did a fine job in putting UNHCR on a more secure financial footing. But the question of resources will not go away, and new

methods of fund-raising will have to be explored.

The problem is that UNHCR depends solely on voluntary contributions from donors. It doesn't have a guaranteed budget like some other UN organizations. Much of the work that UNHCR is asked to do is of an emergency nature. But the organization is not in a position to predict when or where a refugee movement will take place.

1991 is undoubtedly going to be a difficult year, not just for UNHCR but for all humanitarian organizations. Apart from the situation in the Gulf, we have a large influx of refugees arising from conflicts in Somalia and Liberia, not to mention the long-standing refugee problems in Pakistan, South-East Asia and Central America.

**REFUGEES:** Are you concerned that the situation in the Gulf will divert attention and resources from the current emergencies in Africa?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** Yes, that is a clear danger. As I have already said, UNHCR's work is global in nature, and problems of refugees are global in nature, and we should avoid giving preference to any particular region. I believe that what is happening in the Middle East could be of a temporary nature, and eventually the traditional donors will be able to give equal attention to the problems confront-

ing refugees in Africa and other parts of the world.

Unfortunately, the host countries in Africa do not have the resources to cope with large numbers of refugees. Take Malawi, for example, a small and densely populated country where there are well over 900,000 Mozambican refugees. Such countries are also major donors to refugee assistance programmes, because they bear the brunt of the problem.

**REFUGEES:** What role does the international community have to play in tackling the root causes of Africa's refugee problem?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** Stability is essential if we are to tackle the refugee problem, and instability is a symptom of underdevelopment. Most developing countries, particularly those in Africa, are going through a very difficult time. Increased co-operation with the more prosperous countries in areas such as the debt problem, trade relations and development assistance would undoubtedly help African countries to cope with existing refugee situations and to prevent new ones from taking place.

**REFUGEES:** The Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has called upon that organization to play a more active role in resolving the disputes which create refugees. Do you share that view?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** There are many merits in this approach, and I believe that the OAU Secretary-General is in a position to provide the necessary leadership. But a lot depends on the co-operation which the OAU gets from its member states. The political will must be there.

**REFUGEES:** Many refugees left Nigeria during the Biafran war, and subsequently returned to their homeland. Are there any lessons to be learned from that experience?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** The obvious lesson is that if you can re-establish a stable and peaceful atmosphere in a country which has been at war, then refugees will return to their homes. Nigeria was in a rather fortunate position when it came to reintegrating the refugees, because it is blessed with many natural resources, including



*Afghan refugees: an old problem waiting to be resolved.*

UNHCR/A. Hollmann



oil. My country was on a sounder financial footing than some other African countries which are welcoming returnees. Nevertheless, I believe that we will see other success stories in Africa. Indeed, the repatriation of over 40,000 refugees to Namibia in 1989 was an extremely smooth and successful UNHCR operation.

**REFUGEES:** Nigeria has played an active role in trying to resolve the Liberian conflict. How do you assess the current situation?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** As of now I believe there are well over 700,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring and nearby states, including my own. Along with other countries in the region, Nigeria has been able to assemble a peacekeeping force, which has been very successful in separating the warring factions and maintaining peace in Monrovia. This has allowed the UN and other humanitarian organizations to distribute assistance and reduce the flow of refugees. But it will be some time before the wounds are healed in that country.

**REFUGEES:** Does Nigeria have a role to play in the longer-term process of political reconstruction in Liberia?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** Liberia is a sovereign state and naturally we would not like to interfere in the country's internal political affairs. A transitional government has been established, which has been encouraged to hold elections within a reasonable time. But that will require a consensus between the different factions, which does not yet seem to exist. But we are still fairly optimistic that they will eventually be able to sit down and work out their differences so that Liberia can have a democratically elected government.

**REFUGEES:** Are you encouraged by recent developments in South Africa?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** The South African authorities have agreed in principle that UNHCR should play a role in the repatriation of refugees, and the two parties are continuing their discussions. Once an agreement is reached, then we can address the issue of repatriation in a more practical way. As far as the process of political change is concerned, we would like to see things moving a little quicker than at present.

**REFUGEES** – May 1991



*Africa Refugee Day: on 20 June this year, people throughout the world will be commemorating Africa Refugee Day. In this picture we see a refugee artist in Zambia, depicting the plight of the continent's uprooted people.*

**REFUGEES:** Some commentators have predicted a mass migration from Africa to Europe. Is this likely to happen?

**E.A. Azikiwe:** People will always leave countries where there is political tension or serious economic problems. If people cannot find jobs at home, some people will be compelled to seek employment abroad. Africa is no exception. But I do not really believe these predictions.

Most Africans who leave their own country as refugees or migrants remain within the continent. And even those who go further afield usually go back home when conditions have improved. Again, Namibia is a good example. A good number of the exiles who went home returned from Europe and other developed regions.

Interview by  
JEFF CRISP



## **Demilitarized zone**

On 3 April 1991, the UN Security Council passed a resolution allowing for the establishment of a demilitarized zone along the Iraq-Kuwait border to be monitored by a United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM). The purpose of this arrangement is to deter violations of the border and to prevent the deployment of military personnel and equipment within the designated area, a 200-kilometre long zone extending ten kilometres into Iraq and five kilometres into Kuwait.

UNIKOM is to be composed of military contingents provided by various UN member states, comprising both armed and unarmed military personnel. The cost of the mission, which will initially consist of up to 1,440 people, is estimated at approximately US\$ 83 million for the first six months. The governments of Iraq and Kuwait are expected to provide the land and premises required by UNIKOM, and to give the mission full freedom of movement, on land and in the air, across the border and throughout the demilitarized zone.

At the request of the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner agreed exceptionally to provide protection and assistance to refugees and displaced persons who were in the area of Iraq where there was a military presence of the states co-op-

erating with Kuwait, and who would continue to need protection and/or assistance after the withdrawal of that presence.

## **Appeal for funds**

On 9 April 1991, the United Nations launched a US\$ 400.2 million appeal for humanitarian assistance in the Persian Gulf region. US\$ 238.5 million of this sum is earmarked for UNHCR. By 24 April, over US\$ 63.7 million of this amount had been pledged.

## **Humanitarian centres**

On 18 April 1991, Sadruddin Aga Khan, the UN Secretary-General's Executive Delegate, signed a memorandum of agreement with the Iraqi government concerning the establishment of United Nations Humanitarian Centres, staffed by UN civilian personnel, inside the country. These centres will be used to distribute food aid, medical care and other forms of relief. The agreement enables the United Nations to bring relief items into Iraq, from and through neighbouring countries.

In the week of 22 April, a UNHCR team flew to Baghdad to begin implementation of the agreement. They were accompanied by several tonnes of relief and commu-

nications equipment. An advance team of more than ten international experts has been deployed across the country, and will establish field offices in areas along both the Turkish and Iranian borders. Under the terms of the 18 April accord, the field offices will work to ensure the "personal safety and the provision of humanitarian assistance and relief" for all Iraqi displaced persons and refugees who wish to return home. UNHCR officials stressed that the repatriation process must be voluntary in nature.

## **Japanese donations**

In a speech to the Trilateral Commission in Tokyo, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata said that the human tragedy created in the aftermath of the war in the Persian Gulf had brought home to the world for the first time "that mass population movements and their consequences are a threat to international peace and security." She went on to say that "the phenomenon of mass migrations has now been placed firmly where it belongs – on the international political agenda." Talking of her recent visit to the region, Mrs Ogata underlined "the horrendous suffering I saw on young faces." "Those who survive," she continued, "face an uncertain future in appalling misery." Responding to a televised UNHCR appeal, Japanese citizens and organizations contributed nearly US\$ 3 million to ease the plight of the Iraqi refugees.

## **UNHCR in action**

By mid-April 1991, UNHCR had dispatched 128 relief flights to Turkey and Iran, loaded with more than 5,300 tonnes of supplies, including 40,000 tents and tarpaulins and 414,000 blankets. The planes also carried plastic sheeting, high protein foods, cooking utensils and medical supplies. UNHCR field officers have been deployed at all major refugee sites along the Turkish border. In Iran, UNHCR is helping to establish new refugee sites in Bakhtaran, West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, where the bulk of the estimated one million Iraqi refugees are located.









