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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions**Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa****Report of the Secretary-General****Contents**

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I. Introduction

1. On 12 December 1997, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/101, in which it noted that despite all the efforts made so far, the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Africa remains precarious.

2. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other concerned entities were called upon to intensify protection activities through appropriate capacity-building activities and technical assistance. Governments, the United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community were encouraged to create conditions that would facilitate the voluntary return as well as the early rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees.

3. The international community was requested to respond positively to the third-country resettlement requests of African refugees in the spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing, and to continue to fund the general refugee programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner, taking into account the need to rehabilitate the environment and infrastructure in areas affected by refugees in countries of asylum. The special needs of refugee women and children were also emphasized.

4. Governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the international community as a whole were called upon to strengthen the emergency response capacity of the United Nations system on the basis of the experience of the emergency in the Great Lakes region. The need to increase the capacity for coordination and delivery of humanitarian emergency assistance and disaster relief in general on the part of States and others concerned was also stressed.

5. The High Commissioner was requested to submit a comprehensive and consolidated report on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Accordingly, the present report takes into account the efforts expended by the United Nations as well as by countries of asylum. The High Commissioner for Refugees also gave an oral report on the same subject to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1998.

II. Action taken to implement General Assembly resolution 52/101

A. Overview

6. As of the beginning of 1998, UNHCR estimates that Africa hosted 3,481,700 refugees, some 1,694,000 internally displaced and other persons of concern, as well as 2,149,700 returnees in the early stages of reintegration.

7. In addition to assistance and protection activities implemented by UNHCR and other organizations in 1997, the World Food Programme (WFP) recorded a total of 4.2 million refugees and returnees and 14.9 million internally displaced persons throughout the world. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, WFP spent US\$ 334.5 million in 1997 on displaced persons and refugee operations, delivering more than 645,000 tons of food. As of mid-1998, WFP had protracted relief operations in Angola, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Uganda and Zambia. Further assistance is being provided to refugees, returnees and displaced persons through emergency operations in Ethiopia, Uganda and in the Great Lakes region.

8. In her report on Africa issued in early 1998, the High Commissioner deplored that in 1996 alone, 14 of the 53 countries of Africa were affected by armed conflicts, accounting for more than half of all war-related deaths worldwide and resulting in more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons. She stressed that the consequences of those conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity and peace for its peoples.

9. As a result of the High Commissioner's recommendations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as well as WFP, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children, UNICEF and UNHCR are preparing recommendations on additional concrete steps that could be taken to ensure that all refugees and internally displaced persons are adequately protected and provided for, in accordance with internationally recognized rules and procedures. Furthermore, a plan of action is being drawn up to ensure that for their own security and the security of the States from which they fled, refugees be settled at a reasonable distance from the border in camps of limited size, in accordance with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Refugee Convention.

10. There have been positive developments in West Africa, particularly with respect to Liberia, Mali and the Niger. Indeed, the final implementation of the Abuja Peace Accord in Liberia led to elections in July 1997, disarmament and the establishment of state institutions, thus creating conditions for the promotion of repatriation and the return of internally displaced persons to their homes. Although funding constraints constitute a major handicap, efforts are being made to sustain the process and bring it to a conclusion by mid-1999. A further positive development is the successful completion of the repatriation of refugees, mainly of Tuareg origin, to Mali and the Niger.

11. Sierra Leone has constituted a major concern for the West African subregion, with more than 200,000 refugees, mainly women and children, having sought asylum in Liberia and Guinea since March 1998. The atrocities suffered by civilian populations at the hands of the Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)/Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (RUF/AFRC) rebels cannot be overemphasized. In a joint statement issued in Rome in June 1998, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children and armed conflict, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator supported the creation of an International Criminal Court, and appealed that perpetrators of such crimes as those committed in Sierra Leone be prosecuted.

12. In the context of the crisis in Guinea-Bissau, agencies of the United Nations made joint efforts to assess and monitor the situation, as well as to programme joint activities. Coordination and operational mechanisms have been set up at Dakar, where UNHCR and WFP work effectively together. The two agencies, jointly with OCHA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have agreed on the need for immediate assistance to internally displaced persons in order to prevent an outflow of refugees, the working number of beneficiaries and the distribution of tasks and responsibilities, as well as contingency plans in the eventuality of refugee influx to Senegal and to Guinea. This joint programming exercise is reflected in a joint appeal to donors issued by OCHA.

13. Despite the preoccupying situation in some countries of the Horn of Africa, progress was achieved in repatriation to regions enjoying sustainable peace. The repatriation of Somali refugees from the refugee camps in Ethiopia to the north-western part of their country has been very successful, since its resumption in December 1997. Following an agreement reached by all parties concerned, the mass

organized voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian refugees from the Sudan was completed in May 1998. The Eritrean Government has given its consent to begin preparatory activities for the resumption of the repatriation of Eritrean refugees in the Sudan after the rainy season in September 1998.

14. Against this background, the United Nations and the international community have worked decisively towards phasing out assistance to protracted refugee caseloads by actively promoting voluntary repatriation where the initial reason for the flight no longer exists. In a concerted effort, relevant agencies will also pursue vigorously the reintegration processes they initiated in the countries of origin. The post-conflict reintegration and reconstruction challenges in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali and the Niger offer the opportunity to ensure an effective interface among humanitarian, development and sustainable peace initiatives.

15. Training workshops continued to be held to ensure more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive programme planning. In order to promote durable solutions, active support is being given to refugee and displaced women's local initiatives in peace-building activities, such as peace-education and conflict-resolution. The participation of refugee women in camp management committees, as well as food management and distribution, is being enhanced. Priority will also be given to the protection of and assistance for unaccompanied minors, and to the issue of child soldiers.

16. A review of UNHCR assistance to older refugees was carried out in the fall of 1997. The evaluation team travelled extensively to field locations, and case studies were prepared on a number of countries, including the Sudan. The resulting report describes lessons learned and offers recommendations on policy options to address the specific problems of elderly refugees. The main findings of the Sudan case study relate to the phenomenon of negative social selection observed in refugee camps. Many older refugees have become poorer as a result of the loss from departure or death of younger wage earners. The report offered a number of country-specific recommendations, such as the creation of community services structures in the camps to monitor the condition of the elderly, enhancing monitoring procedures and tools, and ensuring that all elderly are receiving supplementary feeding.

17. In an effort to intensify protection activities and promote a dialogue with the High Commissioner's Executive Committee members, UNHCR senior staff have visited a number of African capitals and met with some permanent missions at Geneva. The need for Members of the Executive Committee to lead by example in the area of refugee protection, even in the face of strong domestic political

pressures, was the main conclusion of these consultations. It was also recognized that positive State practice is, in many respects, a *sine qua non* for consistent international backing for refugee protection, while for its part UNHCR would make renewed efforts to meet its statutory responsibilities. This dialogue will be continued both with concerned States and with a range of non-State actors, including regional organizations, United Nations bodies and agencies, the international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations partners, advocacy groups and possibly even the private sector.

18. African refugees accounted for more than one third of the total number of those resettled under the auspices of UNHCR since January 1998 and almost half of the active cases pending decisions by resettlement countries or slated for submission (or resubmission). Several resettlement countries have announced increases in current or future allocations for resettlement of African refugees. The profile of the refugees identified as being in need of resettlement is changing. During the course of 1997, 78 per cent of the refugees resettled from Africa were Somali refugees in Kenya. By the end of the year, the active caseload for UNHCR included refugees of 26 nationalities in 28 countries of asylum, and Somali refugees represented only a quarter of the active caseload; another quarter were Sudanese. This diversification is an important achievement. It is a result of a more proactive use of resettlement to address the particular needs of individuals and groups in accordance with UNHCR criteria. However, the breadth of locations and the diversity of refugee populations pose different challenges for processing and reception. In this light, a regional resettlement meeting of UNHCR staff and officials of resettlement countries was organized at Addis Ababa in April 1998. An effort was made during the regional meeting to place resettlement on the policy agenda, and to identify concrete steps to implement resettlement more effectively, consistently and transparently.

19. In an effort to raise environmental awareness and promote environmental activities, UNHCR has supported workshops in the Sudan and Rwanda, and another will be held soon at Kigoma, United Republic of Tanzania. The first regional environmental training workshop being organized for Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, the Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti will be held at Addis Ababa in October 1998.

20. An inter-agency project entitled "Towards sustainable environmental management practices in refugee-affected areas" is nearing its end. Its main objective is to develop training materials for the refugee-assisted community and to produce practical guidelines to decision makers, UNHCR field staff and partner agencies in order to harmonize

environmental operations in the field. The agencies involved include WFP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), as well as some non-governmental organizations.

21. Since 1997, UNHCR has been part of the GLOBE programme, which is an inter-agency programme of the United States Government designed to encourage refugee children to protect their local environments. Based on the success of this programme in the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya and Benin in 1997, UNHCR is planning to include Senegal in the programme in 1998.

B. Regional overviews

1. The Great Lakes region of Africa

22. Following the mass repatriation of refugees from former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and the United Republic of Tanzania at the end of 1996 and early 1997, the United Nations was (and remains) confronted by the challenges of reintegrating the great majority of them as returnees in Rwanda as well as in Burundi, along with ensuring protection and finding solutions for the remaining tens of thousands who have so far chosen not to repatriate. The some 260,000 Burundi refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania constitute the region's largest single refugee group. The largest repatriation operation in the region involves some 70,000 refugees of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who are in the process of returning from the United Republic of Tanzania. UNHCR delivered care and maintenance assistance to these groups of refugees and returnees, collaborating extensively with WFP (for food assistance) and UNICEF (for programmes focusing on children and unaccompanied minors) in the process.

23. The challenges facing the United Nations agencies, in particular UNHCR, in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa included the tasks of ensuring protection for the refugees remaining outside their countries, reintegrating those who have returned home and rehabilitating areas affected by the presence of refugees.

24. Although the challenge of protection is a familiar theme for UNHCR worldwide, the flight of Rwandan refugees from their country in 1994 in the aftermath of genocide gave rise to protection and security problems of exceptional gravity. The camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire) and the United Republic of Tanzania harboured not only genuine refugees but also many of the perpetrators of the

1994 Rwandan genocide (including the remnants of the former Rwandan Government and armed forces), close to the borders of their country of origin. The inability or failure of the international community and host Governments, despite the High Commissioner's repeated calls for action, to effect the separation of criminals and armed elements from refugees, contributed to regional instability and to the outbreak of the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire) in late 1996. It also led some military units to identify refugees with perpetrators of genocide and to treat them accordingly. In addition to the tragic consequences for tens of thousands of refugees, the failure to make a clear distinction between refugees and criminal elements continues to hinder the exercise of the international protection mandate of UNHCR in the region.

25. During her February 1998 mission to Africa, the High Commissioner emphasized that it was necessary and feasible to reconcile the protection of refugees with the interests of the countries concerned, including their national security. In her meetings with the leaders of the region, they discussed actions that could be taken to address these concerns, including measures to ensure the purely civilian character of refugee camps and to exclude persons who do not qualify for refugee status. The meeting also covered the need for UNHCR to have access to refugees and returnees, and for Governments to ensure the security of UNHCR and other humanitarian agency staff. These issues were addressed at a ministerial-level regional meeting on refugee issues in the Great Lakes held at Kampala in May 1998.

26. The reintegration of returnees presents a special challenge in the Great Lakes region of Africa, given the legacy of genocide in Rwanda and the persistence of conflict in Rwanda, Burundi and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Successful reintegration requires not only material assistance but also measures to promote justice, and eventually the reconciliation of former refugees with the other members of their home communities. Indeed, material assistance, such as in the rehabilitation or construction of rural housing, health centres and education facilities, combined with support for the justice system and measures for the restoration of livelihoods, can play a vital role in reducing the possibilities for conflict among the members of different groups, and hence can foster reconciliation. Although it is recognized that reconciliation following the horrors of genocide is a time-consuming process, a resurgence of violence and further refugee flows will be unavoidable unless members of the different groups can find ways to live side by side without fear. Reconciliation is a task that will require concerted and long-term support from the international community for initiatives that must come from

the Governments and people of the countries themselves. Reintegration programmes of the United Nations agencies and their implementing partners are intended to contribute to this healing process.

27. The rehabilitation of areas affected by the presence of refugees is necessary to mitigate the social and environmental impact of refugees on the communities that host them, and to help redress the perceived disparities in the levels of international assistance provided to refugees as compared to the local population. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, UNHCR rehabilitation programmes in countries of asylum have also been of vital importance in maintaining access to refugees and in enabling UNHCR to perform its protection function.

28. Both reintegration and rehabilitation are tasks that require the participation of agencies of the United Nations and other humanitarian and development organizations, in close collaboration with Governments concerned. In the Great Lakes operation, UNHCR has primarily undertaken rehabilitation projects that could be implemented quickly and were designed to meet the most immediate needs of returnee or refugee-affected communities, needs that UNHCR staff, given their presence in the field and familiarity with local conditions, are well placed to evaluate and address. It is necessary to combine these immediate requirements with longer-term rehabilitation projects that converge with development objectives. In order to ensure that the various actors bring the necessary expertise to the rehabilitation process in a coordinated and consistent manner, UNHCR, in addition to participating in the normal inter-agency coordination mechanisms, established a partnership with UNDP in Rwanda, and more recently with WFP, to form a joint reintegration planning unit to plan and manage reintegration activities.

29. Under the current Great Lakes operation, WFP is supplying vital assistance to an average of 1.4 million beneficiaries per month in Rwanda, Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Congo.

30. In 1998, WFP plans to deliver about 256,570 metric tons of food to the victims of the Great Lakes regional crisis. About 36 per cent of the food will be used for care and maintenance of refugees, 28 per cent to assist displaced and local affected people, 27 per cent for rehabilitation activities, 6 per cent to support nutritional programmes and 3 per cent for returnee/resettlement programmes. Average monthly food deliveries exceed 21,000 tons.

31. WFP, in collaboration with UNHCR, is providing food assistance to an average of 410,000 refugees located in the

United Republic of Tanzania (344,000), Rwanda (29,000), Republic of Congo (8,000) and Uganda (29,000).

2. West Africa

Repatriation and reintegration of Malian refugees

32. The repatriation of Malian refugees was completed in May 1998. More than 130,000 refugees repatriated to Mali with the assistance of the international community. In northern Mali, WFP, in close cooperation with other agencies, has been assisting the return, resettlement and reintegration of refugees living in Algeria, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mauritania since mid-1997. Returnees have been actively participating in resettlement and rehabilitation activities, together with local populations. In conjunction with a UNDP-funded project, WFP has also helped to reintegrate former rebels in society. This project has provided cash resources and food-for-work to build up new civilian economic activities in different sectors. Should resources be available and security permit, activities in northern Mali will continue until the end of 1998.

Repatriation and reintegration of refugees from the Niger

33. As of mid-1998, all 3,200 refugees from the Niger had returned from Algeria and Burkina Faso. Major efforts were made to prepare returnee sites prior to the return movement.

34. As is the case in Mali, the Niger programme has faced serious funding constraints and has been hampered by targeted acts of banditry. UNHCR scaled down its presence at the end of June 1998, when the return movement was completed, and is now monitoring a multi-year rehabilitation programme.

Liberian refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons

35. From the start of the promotion phase in December 1997 until July 1998, some 62,400 refugees had returned under the auspices of the international community. According to government authorities, a further 180,000 Liberian refugees returned spontaneously during the same period. In Liberia, UNICEF has been active in ensuring that special services for children and women were available in areas where both internally displaced persons and refugees are returning to their communities of origin, while WFP continues to implement a programme that aims at the eventual repatriation and resettlement of 737,000 internally displaced persons in Liberia, and 548,000 returning from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In Liberian returnees' communities, WFP

has been promoting a major operation to promote rehabilitation of the local infrastructure, based on extensive food-for-work activities. Simultaneously, targeted food aid, including school feeding, food-for-work, food-for-training and nutritional rehabilitation, is being distributed as reinstallation and resettlement takes place. UNHCR received earmarked funds in July 1998 to finance its participation in the joint UNHCR/UNICEF Liberia Children's Initiative for the reintegration of refugee and internally displaced Liberian children. Activities include teacher-training, school-focused income-generation, girls' education, environmental education, and tracing and integration assistance for unaccompanied children.

Sierra Leonean refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons

36. Following the military intervention launched by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)/Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops in February 1998, President Kabbah was reinstated on 10 March 1998. The security situation has since vastly improved in Freetown and some major cities in the interior of the country but as of mid-1998, remained very volatile in the eastern part of the country. Since early April 1998, international staff of United Nations agencies, including UNHCR, have returned to Freetown. In late March, President Kabbah formally launched the United Nations Flash Appeal for Humanitarian Assistance to Sierra Leone in the presence of United Nations agencies. The appeal sought \$11.2 million to meet immediate humanitarian needs in Sierra Leone, with a particular emphasis on refugees and internally displaced persons. In Sierra Leone and Guinea, UNICEF has been concentrating on providing urgent health assistance to newly internally displaced persons and refugees. Special assistance to victims of amputations in Sierra Leone is being provided by UNICEF in the form of medical supplies to International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) teams and hospitals. Additionally, household food security support is also extended to female-headed households, most of whom have been displaced by the conflict. WFP and its implementing partners have resumed emergency food aid distribution to more than 500,000 internally displaced persons and the growing number of refugees in Liberia and Guinea, currently estimated at 300,000.

37. In April 1998, the High Commissioner's Special Representative in Liberia invited the Liberian Minister of Defence to take action with regard to violent harassment of civilians (mainly returning refugees) by law enforcement officers in various parts of the country, particularly in areas close to the border with Sierra Leone. A technical cooperation

programme is being designed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in order to strengthen the judicial system and provide advisory services to Sierra Leone. OHCHR is planning to send human rights observers to Sierra Leone to monitor the ongoing trials of military personnel and civilians allegedly involved in human rights violations.

38. Should the security situation improve inside Sierra Leone, the large-scale return of refugees could be promoted. Until such time, the return of urban refugees from Conakry and some other cities in the subregion to Freetown is being facilitated. As of mid-1998, some 6,500 Sierra Leonean refugees have been assisted to repatriate under this scheme.

Bissau Guinean refugees and internally displaced persons

39. Since the beginning of the conflict in June 1998 in Guinea-Bissau, most of the 300,000 inhabitants of the capital city, Bissau, have fled to the countryside, where confrontations between mutineers and supporters of the President have been less frequent. Appeals have been launched by various parties, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to leaders in the region, warning that the conflict could result in a humanitarian crisis. Although as of mid-1998 a relatively small number of Guinea-Bissau's one million inhabitants had crossed into neighbouring countries, the risk of a refugee outflow has been constantly increasing since hundreds of thousands of displaced persons are without adequate food, drinking water and medical care. Humanitarian agencies have pressed to deliver aid inside Guinea-Bissau. The first convoys arrived by road from Senegal in the eastern towns of Bafata and Gabu on 16 July 1998. It should be noted that since the beginning of the conflict the international community has had no access to some 5,000 Senegalese refugees who had been living in the north region of the country before the crisis.

Somali refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons

40. The organized repatriation of Somali refugees from camps in Ethiopia to north-western Somalia, which started in February 1997, is continuing. As of July 1998, over 28,000 refugees have returned to their country of origin under UNHCR auspices. In 1998, 60,000 refugees are expected to repatriate from Ethiopia to north-western Somalia.

41. In addition to returns from Ethiopia, some 500 refugees repatriated from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, 400 from Yemen, 300 from Kenya and 100 from Djibouti. In March, over 700 refugees were repatriated through an airlift

operation from the Dadaab camp in Kenya to Bossaso in north-east Somalia. In order to maintain the momentum created following the new approach to programming and fund-raising adopted by the United Nations collectively, another United Nations consolidated appeal for Somalia was issued on 31 March 1998.

42. In other parts of Somalia, the first phase of the emergency response to the catastrophic flooding that occurred in the low lands, in which UNICEF played an important role, ended in late 1997, but an emergency situation still remains, requiring continued relief supplies and services in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education and child protection.

Repatriation and reintegration of Ethiopian refugees

43. The mass organized voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian refugees from the Sudan, which commenced in 1993, was concluded in May 1998. A total of 72,327 Ethiopians were assisted with organized transportation from their places of abode in the Sudan to the reception centres in Ethiopia and onwards to their individual places of origin. They were also provided with reintegration packages, including a cash grant and WFP food package for nine months.

44. The remaining caseload of Ethiopian refugees in Kenya, estimated at 5,000 refugees, will be repatriated during the latter part of 1998. The completion of this movement will mark the end of organized mass repatriation of Ethiopian refugees from the countries of asylum.

Assistance to Sudanese refugees and internally displaced persons

45. Besides UNHCR protection and assistance activities in Uganda, key UNICEF response to the northern and western parts of the country included support to the delivery of emergency medical services and supplies; the construction of temporary schools for displaced children; emergency water and sanitation activities; advocacy to stop the abduction of children and ensure their return; and psycho-social programmes for affected children.

46. Inside the Sudan, UNICEF complemented traditional emergency relief with actions to promote respect for humanitarian principles through Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). With an estimated 1.2 million people needing urgent assistance in the face of famine and starvation, particularly in the Bahr el Ghazal region, UNICEF, WFP and other partners continue to try and reach vulnerable groups by road, air and barge with essential services, including food, vaccinations, basic education, tools and seeds, supplementary feeding, water/sanitation and protection and care of children

with special needs. The need for food aid has greatly increased due to escalating insecurity and drought, which occurred during the cultivation period in 1997. WFP's emergency operation to refugees, war-affected and internally displaced persons, which falls under the umbrella of OLS is expected to reach about 2.6 million needy people.

3. Southern Africa

Repatriation of Angolan refugees

47. In spite of the dedicated and able efforts of the High Commissioner's Special Representative to Angola, progress towards implementation of the Lusaka Protocol has proven to be a painstaking and frustrating process. However, during the tenure of Maitre Alioune Blondin Beye, positive developments included normalization of state administration in 272 of the total 335 localities, and formal recognition of UNITA as a political party by the Government of Unity and National Reconstruction. In addition, many UNITA senior officials took positions in the new Government. UNITA officials were appointed as Governors in some provinces and radio VORGAN ceased its propaganda broadcasts.

48. The implementation of the Lusaka Peace Accord has been unfortunately impeded by the failure of UNITA to fulfil its obligations. Armed attacks, mainly by UNITA, in most of the provinces, including Zaire Uige and Moxico, have led to an overall deterioration of the security situation in Angola. A number of ambushes and mine incidents occurred in which several hundred Angolan national police and army personnel were killed. UNITA has been reluctant to hand over four strategic locations, namely Andulo, Bailundo, Mungo and N'Harea. UNITA has also recently recaptured municipalities in Moxico Province, eastern Angola, through armed attacks. In addition, there was extensive looting of offices and assets, all of which compelled UNHCR to relocate staff from some of the more dangerous locations in northern and eastern Angola. In view of these security constraints, UNHCR had no choice but to declare a temporary suspension of the repatriation and reintegration programmes with effect from the end of June 1998.

49. Angolan refugees continued to return spontaneously, and between 1995 and mid-1998 a total of 143,577 Angolan refugees had returned to their home country. The total number of returnees includes 14,283 Angolans who returned between January and May 1998. Based on the initial improved political climate and coupled with the completion of key rehabilitation activities and planned organized transport for a limited number of vulnerable refugees, UNHCR had envisaged that most of the 160,000 Angolan refugees would have opted to return spontaneously in 1998. The current situation, however,

is dramatically different: returnee movements have come to a complete halt, and well over 20,000 Angolan refugees have actually left the country, going to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the wake of mounting insecurity. In addition, some 90,000 internally displaced persons have fled their villages of origin and are flocking to safe havens. In the light of this new situation, UNHCR's original planning assumptions for 1998–1999 are under complete review.

50. Notwithstanding the security and financial constraints that resulted in the delay in the repatriation, UNHCR made a tangible and visible impact in the returnee villages by rehabilitating social infrastructure. This included the repair of access roads, food delivery and other relief items to returnees, and most importantly, the rehabilitation and staffing of medical facilities, schools and water supply systems. Following the takeover by UNITA of many returnee areas that were formerly under state administration, most of these facilities seem to have been looted. A formal complaint was lodged against UNITA in the Joint Commission to compensate for the damage and destruction that appears to have occurred. These recent events, coupled with the arrival of many thousands of new Angolan refugees in neighbouring countries over the past few weeks, cast a doubt over the possible early repatriation of Angolans from asylum countries.

Internally displaced persons

51. After nearly 30 years of conflict, Angola is a country where displacement has become the norm, with up to one million persons internally displaced at any given time. As prospects for peace improved in late 1997 and early 1998, over 120,000 internally displaced persons were resettled to their communities of origin. UNICEF's field presence in seven provinces facilitated the provision of resettlement and relief kits to some 15,000 resettled families in close collaboration with non-governmental organizations, WFP and government counterparts. Some 20,000 families who remained in camps for internally displaced persons received UNICEF assistance targeted to women and children, including basic health services, emergency education assistance and support to psycho-social services for traumatized children, and mine awareness. Unfortunately, by June 1998 increased military activity in certain provinces sparked new displacements.

52. Following the deterioration in the security situation in some provinces of the country, the human rights officers deployed in Malanje, Cuanza Norte, Moxico, Luanda Sul, Bengo, Huila and Uige have been recently dealing with cases of internally displaced persons. In cooperation with representatives of the Government, UNHCR, non-

governmental organizations and the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Assistance Coordination, the human rights officers have been visiting camps of internally displaced persons. The people interviewed reportedly left their homes following attacks on areas where the central authority had recently been restored (Uige, Bengo, Cuanza Norte, Moxico) or for fear of possible attacks, especially after the departure of the local authorities (Luanda Sul, Huila, Malanje).

Durable solutions for urban refugees in southern Africa

53. With political stability prevailing in southern Africa, there are no major refugee problems in the subregion (with the exception of Angolan refugees). UNHCR is, therefore, assisting relatively few urban refugees. They originate mainly from Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, and local integration is being sought for them. These refugees are not likely to repatriate or resettle in the near future. Most Governments accept local integration for those refugees who have attained economic self-reliance and who are able to sustain themselves without external support. Therefore, UNHCR has been supporting vocational training and business loans or micro-credits for the urban refugees. It is intended that this will lead to income-generation activities, with subsequent increased levels of self-reliance.

Rural refugees

54. It has to be acknowledged that some of the Governments' policies have been less conducive to the implementation of income-generating activities. For instance, in certain countries refugees are accommodated in remote camps in sparsely populated areas. In such cases, income-generating activities may not be sustainable due to lack of market for products. In other countries, the limited movement of refugees inhibits certain types of income-generating activities. There have also been problems in connection with repayment of loans and identifying appropriate implementing partners that can manage revolving funds. Despite these constraints, some income-generating activities in the southern Africa subregion, namely tailoring, poultry-raising, commercial baking, restaurant management and carpentry, have been successful and have enabled refugees to attain a reasonable level of self-reliance.

55. UNHCR's main challenge is to ensure that refugees are allowed to work and enjoy free movement so that they can engage in productive and profitable activities. UNHCR will also look for competent implementing partners in order to manage revolving funds.

C. Inter-agency cooperation

56. Since the revised version of their memorandum of understanding came into effect on 31 March 1997, WFP and UNHCR have been involved in a number of joint initiatives to improve cooperation. A workshop was held at Abidjan in March 1998, following a first similar initiative at Kampala in December 1997, with a view to giving WFP country directors and UNHCR field representatives an opportunity to discuss their experiences in implementing the memorandum, to review problems where relevant and to help clarify clauses in the memorandum.

57. Bilateral agreements have been signed with the World Bank and UNHCR to collaborate with and complement each other in rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration efforts in the countries that are emerging from post-conflict situations. Similarly, significant progress has been made to initiate cooperation with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNDP and FAO.

58. Initial steps have also been taken towards formulating a joint collaborative project/programme between the World Bank/UNDP/UNHCR to be implemented in Uganda – a self-reliance programme aimed at benefiting some 170,000 Sudanese refugees in settlements provided by the Government. With the collaboration of IFAD and the World Bank in countries and areas that are emerging from a post-conflict situation, UNHCR has initiated rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration activities. Among these, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, north-western Somalia and Rwanda are the front runners. The participation of the African Development Bank and other bilateral and multilateral agencies, such as the European Union, is also being sought to take over the developmental activities required to accelerate the process of reintegration of displaced populations in their home areas. In addition, UNHCR has been increasingly involved in the design of strategies for refugees' and returnees' self-reliance. Self-reliance is part of an effort within UNHCR to find more cost-effective and durable solutions for refugees and returnees. Moreover, attaining partial or even full self-reliance is a way for refugees to increase their self-esteem and in general to strengthen community links and structures. Self-reliance options include direct job placement, job-oriented vocational training and micro-finance.

59. The 1996 memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and UNICEF gives primary responsibility for the welfare of refugee children to UNHCR, while UNICEF takes the lead role for children in their country of origin. Over the last few years, UNHCR, UNICEF, and such organizations as

ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Save the Children Alliance have established a close working relationship to protect and assist unaccompanied minors. Throughout 1997, UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC and others participated in a collaborative inter-agency effort to trace unaccompanied children and reunite them with their families, focusing principally on finding the families of more than 26,000 children identified as unaccompanied after the mass return of Rwandans from former Zaire in late 1996. By April 1998, more than 18,000 of these children had been reunited with their families, while roughly 6,000 remain in 48 institutions across the country of origin awaiting reunions. While tracing continues, UNICEF, UNHCR and non-governmental organization partners have continued to provide basic support (shelter, food, water, medical care) with ongoing tracing, reunion and fostering activities.

60. In November 1997, Save the Children called an inter-agency meeting on family tracing and reunification at Nairobi. Participants included UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and involved non-governmental organizations. The meeting produced an inter-agency action plan addressing issues of prevention of separation, inter-agency collaboration, and fostering reunification and reintegration. A follow-up meeting was held at Geneva in June 1998.

61. UNHCR received funds in July 1998 earmarked to finance its participation in the joint UNHCR/UNICEF Liberia Children's Initiative for the reintegration of refugee and internally displaced children.

D. Cooperation with subregional organizations

1. Organization of African Unity

62. UNHCR continued to participate actively in the meetings of the OAU Commission on Refugees, and extended assistance and support to the Commission during its visits to refugee camps and settlements in Africa. As requested through a resolution adopted by the 1997 OAU Council of Ministers and Heads of State and Government summit sessions at Harare, UNHCR collaborated and will continue to cooperate with OAU in the preparations for the OAU Commission on Refugees' ministerial meeting on refugees and displaced persons in Africa, scheduled to be held in Khartoum in December 1998.

63. During the period under review, UNHCR and OAU engaged in a process of joint and bilateral consultations with the Governments concerned in the Great Lakes region to find

lasting solutions to the refugee problems there. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the OAU Secretary-General co-chaired a regional meeting on refugee issues in the Great Lakes at Kampala in May 1998. The meeting entrusted OAU and UNHCR with follow-up on the recommendations, including cooperating with broader regional and international forums and institutions. The results of the regional meeting could provide important input to the OAU ministerial meeting on refugees in December 1998.

64. In April 1998, UNHCR intensified its support to OAU in the area of early warning and conflict prevention. Building upon previous missions and consultations between OAU and UNHCR in this area, an experienced UNHCR staff member was seconded to assist OAU Conflict Division in developing a set of parameters for providing a description of potential or actual conflict situations. UNHCR will continue to collaborate with OAU to facilitate a structured and systematic approach to streamlining information-gathering and reporting and analysing conflicts.

65. As a follow-up to previous meetings on peace-building held at Kampala, Johannesburg and Kigali, UNHCR, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), OAU and United Nations agencies organized a regional workshop on best practices of women in peace-building and conflict-resolution in November 1997. This complementary and mutually reinforcing activity on women in peace-making and peace-building could provide useful input to the OAU/ECA African Women's Committee on Peace and Development, set up in April 1998.

2. Economic Community of West African States

66. In addition to regular contacts with ECOWAS officials concerning the situation in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau, UNHCR participated in a regional forum on the role of ECOWAS in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in West Africa. Other joint initiatives will be proposed in the context of the Liberian repatriation operation and the Sierra Leonean emergency.

3. Intergovernmental Authority on Development

67. On the basis of the memorandum of understanding signed on 19 June 1997 between the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and UNHCR, which defined areas and modalities of cooperation, a number of joint actions were taken. These included planning of a workshop on emergency preparedness which will be organized with the IGAD secretariat.

4. Southern African Development Community

68. The idea to promote subregional cooperation on refugee-related issues through the framework offered by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) stems from a series of developments that have taken place in the last few years in southern Africa and that have profoundly changed the refugee situation in the subregion. UNHCR has seized the opportunity offered by the democratization process to raise awareness on human rights and refugee issues and influence government policies accordingly. To this end, in July 1996 UNHCR and SADC signed a memorandum of understanding providing a broad framework for cooperation between the two organizations.

69. The memorandum provides for cooperation between UNHCR and SADC in various areas related to refugees and migratory movements, including accession to international refugee instruments, enactment/amendment of national legislation and strengthening of regional emergency preparedness mechanisms. UNHCR also will participate in preventive diplomacy directed at root causes of population displacements. These objectives will be achieved through a process of consultations with member States.

70. In January 1998, the SADC Council of Ministers, at its meeting at Maputo, discussed the refugee situation in the region, and noted the need for establishing a regional mechanism for safeguarding the human rights of refugees. The Council urged member States to adopt measures to harmonize and unify procedures and criteria for the protection and provision of social support to refugees. Following the approval of the SADC Council of Ministers to conduct consultations, working groups have been formed representing Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. These working groups will make proposals on how to address the refugee problems in the South African Development Community. The working group, UNHCR, the SADC secretariat and a consultant met in May and June 1998 to draft an initial declaration on refugees. In order to secure consensus from various Governments, working group members are currently visiting member States to discuss the contents of the draft declaration on refugees, which will be considered by SADC at its next meeting, scheduled for September 1998.

III. Conclusion

71. The situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa is among priority concerns of the United Nations. Coordinated efforts continue to address the complex

problems faced by many countries on the African continent. Two areas, however, deserve further attention: the obligation of States to minimize the suffering of its civilian populations, and the need for clear and effective action by political leaders in the pursuit and consolidation of political solutions.

72. Firm support for the principles of refugee law by States and other actors is a prerequisite to the solution of the refugee problem, as well as the search for peace and stability in areas of conflict in Africa. Regrettably, in many instances it has proved difficult to implement the key provisions of international refugee law at crucial moments of crisis. To effectively address this problem in the future and drawing from the lessons learnt, as well as experience of the Great Lakes operation, especially between 1994 and 1996, a two-track approach is required, ensuring both the physical and legal separation of refugees from those found to be undeserving of that status. Those individuals who do not qualify for international protection under the United Nations and OAU refugee conventions, who are bearing arms and who are known to be responsible for acts of intimidation should not be accommodated in refugee camps. They should be disarmed by the host country. In situations where the national authorities lack the capacity to take such action, regional or international measures need to be considered.

73. In many instances in recent years, large-scale population displacements in Africa have been deliberately provoked or engineered by the parties to armed conflict themselves with the intention of furthering their political and/or military interests. Although it is acknowledged that the massive movement and presence of displaced populations has impinged very directly on the national and security interests of States, it must also be emphasized that solutions to these situations lie in political dialogue and the efforts of leaders to promote political solutions.