

Foreword

In early 2004 the world was transfixed by reports of the unfolding crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. Aid workers were granted only glimpses of events taking place in this vast region, but dispatches grew ever more alarming as accounts emerged of forced population displacement, wholesale destruction of villages, and rape.

UNHCR scaled up its presence on both sides of the border in response to the outflow of refugees into Chad and the critical needs in Darfur. By the end of the year, refugee camps had been stabilized and staff had gained a measure of access to displaced populations in Sudan. But despite a hopeful turn in the country's north-south dialogue there was no political solution in sight for Darfur, which remains one of UNHCR's greatest concerns.

In addition to the 200,000 refugees sheltered in arid eastern Chad, the Office took responsibility for the protection of IDPs in western Darfur at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General and the Government of Sudan. Halfway through the year, the Office appointed a Director of Operations to manage the Sudan situation, including Chad, and staff were deployed to the two countries as the operation quickly became UNHCR's largest.

The crisis in Sudan again illustrated the importance of collective and coordinated humanitarian action. UNHCR made significant progress in this area in 2004, equipping itself to work more closely with partners within and outside the UN system. The Office is committed to the process of integrated UN missions and has begun a staff exchange with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to help plan joint missions. UNHCR succeeded in drawing greater attention to the critical link between population displacement and international peace and security through increased collaboration with DPKO and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). The safety of returning refugees and IDPs was incorporated in the mandates of peace-keeping missions, a practice that will be expanded in coming years. The Office also joined forces with the World Bank in 2004 to ensure that displacement issues, in particular the productive capacity of returning refugees, are included in poverty reduction strategies.

UNHCR helped revise IDP policy through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which endorsed a new set of guidelines in July. These will be a valuable asset for Humanitarian Coordinators and agencies alike as they put the collaborative approach to IDPs into practice.

The recognition that global humanitarian needs require broad engagement led UNHCR to introduce measures which expand the role of NGO partners in the organization's process of mobilizing resources, programming, operating and providing protection for persons of concern. Representatives were directed to involve partners in regular dialogue and cooperation on protection. Steps taken in 2004 toward this more inclusive approach also included additional protection and security training for partners.

Beyond Darfur, operations in Africa provided reasons for optimism. Refugees returned home in significant numbers to Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, making 2004 one of the most successful years on record for repatriation on the continent.

There were long-term achievements in other regions as well. In November, High Commissioner Lubbers used the 20-year commemoration of the Cartagena Declaration to underscore the emphasis the document placed on durable solutions along with refugees' social, economic and cultural rights. The Mexico City gathering produced a Plan of Action which will address the two most significant long-term issues facing Latin America at present – the increasing number of refugees concentrated in urban centres and the growing number of Colombians in need of protection – and pledges to increase refugee resettlement within the region.

In 2004, the third year of large-scale repatriation to Afghanistan, UNHCR and governments pushed ahead with preparations to manage regional population movements once the assisted return operation winds down. And in Europe, UNHCR engaged governments on the pressing question of irregular secondary movements, challenging States to preserve asylum space and access for refugees to durable solutions through the Agenda for Protection.



UNHCR's Acting High Commissioner, Wendy Chamberlin, briefing reporters in Geneva shortly after her mission to south Sudan in February 2004 when she observed the preparations for the return of millions of refugees and internally displaced people. *UNHCR/S. Hopper*

At the global level, the Convention Plus initiative produced a *Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement* in June. The following month, another initiative aimed at finding sustainable solutions for refugees received broad endorsement when ECOSOC called on States to fund the implementation of the '4Rs' and similar concepts for facilitating the transition from relief to development. The tools UNHCR developed in 2004 will help States share the responsibility of refugee protection.

In March, UNHCR co-hosted a Ministerial meeting on durable solutions in Africa which recalled that bringing an end to the cycle of violence that has dominated many of the continent's States would depend on stronger commitment to post-conflict reconstruction. The world was given a grisly reminder of the destructiveness of long-running hostilities when 150 refugees were massacred in August at Gatumba, Burundi, in one of the year's darkest moments.

The number of persons of concern to UNHCR continued to decline in 2004. Large-scale repatriation operations and new approaches to durable solutions sustained trends which emerged in 2002 and, at year end, there were approximately 17 million people of concern to the Office, representing a drop of 10 million since the mid-1990s. Confirming a three-year downward trend, fewer asylum-seekers arrived in industrialized countries during 2004 than in any year since 1988.

Solid donor support and improved financial management both contributed to greater budgetary stability in 2004. UNHCR enjoys financial security owing in part to success in expanding donor countries at the December Pledging Conference to 48, up from 34 the year before. At the same time, UNHCR was compelled to launch several appeals – some for emergency situations – and entered 2005 with four Supplementary Programmes.

This Global Report presents an in-depth account of UNHCR's achievements and the impact of its work on the lives of refugees in 2004. It also provides UNHCR with the opportunity to thank donors and partners alike for their support to the work of the Office and to refugees.

Despite many challenges, UNHCR's staff members are encouraged by the results of our joint efforts in 2004 to protect and assist some 17 million persons around the globe to find durable solutions to their plight. In 2004, UNHCR continued emphasis on implementing a results based management culture. For the first time, the organization issued Global Strategic Objectives for a two-year period 2005-2006, and instructed field offices to lead comprehensive needs based assessments with partners. We commit ourselves to pursuing these objectives and count on the vital collaboration of our partners and donors.

Wendy Chamberlin