

ExCom 2004: Africa

Part A: Major developments

The 8 March Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa reaffirmed the support of the international community for voluntary repatriation in different parts of the continent. Since March, refugees have indeed continued to go home to Sierra Leone, Angola, Burundi, north-west Somalia and Liberia, and UNHCR is guardedly optimistic about prospects for return to southern Sudan. The Darfur crisis, however, which has compelled over one million persons to flee their homes, casts a shadow over these otherwise positive developments.

West Africa: Sierra Leone continues to consolidate its recovery. In July 2004 UNHCR managed to complete its assisted repatriation programme that had started in 2001, bringing some 270,000 refugees back home. However, reintegration remains a challenge, and success in the implementation of development activities will be vital to ensure sustainable recovery and break the cycle of violence. In Liberia the deployment of UNMIL throughout the country enabled UNHCR to establish a presence in all areas of return to prepare for the organized repatriation of more than 300,000 Liberian refugees from neighbouring countries in the region. The successful reintegration of ex-combatants (some 65,000 have been demobilized) is one of the greatest challenges ahead.

The Great Lakes: With security restored to most areas in the country, over 77,000 refugees had returned to Burundi by the end of August. The overall improvement of the situation in the country was overshadowed by the deplorable massacre of 151 refugees of Banyamulenge origin in August. This massacre highlighted once more the crucial importance of keeping refugee camps at a safe distance from the border. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo fighting in Bukavu in June 2004 led to the outflow of some 20,000 refugees, mainly to Burundi and Rwanda. UNHCR, together with countries of asylum, continues to plan for repatriation to the Equateur region.

East and the Horn of Africa: In Somalia considerable progress has been made in the peace process, and during the first half of 2004 over 9,200 refugees repatriated to northern Somalia, mainly from Ethiopia and Djibouti. As a result, UNHCR was able to close down the refugee camp of Hartisheikh in Ethiopia in June 2004. In Sudan, the Naivasha peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army raised further hopes for a large-scale voluntary repatriation movement to southern Sudan. However, optimism regarding a solution for the South was tempered by the mass displacement continuing in Darfur. With over one million persons displaced, including some 200,000 refugees in Chad, UNHCR launched a large-scale operation to provide protection and humanitarian assistance in Chad, and as part of a collaborative United Nations on behalf of IDPs in Sudan. The relocation of some 150,000 refugees away from the border to nine camps further inland, in the face of massive climatic and logistical constraints, has been a major achievement of this operation. To strengthen coordination and management of the different operations related to the Sudan situation, UNHCR has created a Special Unit with dedicated staff and additional resources.

Southern Africa: Organized repatriation movements to Angola resumed at the end of the rainy season in May 2004 with more than 20,000 refugees returning in convoys by early September. A further 6,000 spontaneous returnees were assisted upon arrival in Angola. Nevertheless, the lack

of access to many return areas due to landmines, destroyed bridges and poor road conditions continued to hamper repatriation. UNHCR strongly encouraged increased investment by the Government as well as development agencies to facilitate the return and reintegration of refugees in the remote border areas of Angola.

In South Africa the Office embarked on a sensitization drive to raise the awareness of government authorities and mobilize the support of the civil society to dispel misconceptions about refugees.

Part B: Progress on UNHCR's global objectives and the Agenda for Protection

Support governments in the provision of protection and assistance (Strategic Goal 4)

- UNHCR continued to strive to ensure adequate *physical protection* of refugees. In addition to security packages, in several countries (e.g. Kenya, Sierra Leone, the United Republic of Tanzania and Chad) UNHCR is increasingly focussing on activities related to peace education, mediation and conflict resolution, which have resulted in the pre-emption or solution of inter-communal or inter-family conflicts. Measures to safeguard the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps were successfully maintained in Sierra Leone, where funding by a major donor has proven crucial to ensuring adequate levels of assistance in internment areas, thereby preventing their infiltration. Also, arrangements to ensure the safety and security of refugee camps through close liaison between voluntary refugee patrols monitoring safety inside camps, and local law and order authorities in charge of security around camps, proved to be particularly effective in Sierra Leone.
- **Enhanced cooperation with the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR):** Modalities for the operationalization of the MOU signed by UNHCR and ACHPR last year have been agreed upon, and one of the Commissioners was designated as Special Rapporteur for Refugees. A joint conference will be held in October 2004, which will focus on concrete modalities to use the Commission to further refugee protection, and provide training to local and international NGOs on how to submit individual and group petitions to the Commission.
- A conference with the **African Parliamentary Union** on Refugee Protection in Africa (Cotonou, June 2004) examined legal and physical protection and access to durable solutions, and aimed to sensitize parliamentarians to the contribution refugees can make to their host country as well as the importance of promoting tolerance and understanding of refugees amongst their constituents. The Conference produced a comprehensive legislative plan of action for African parliamentarians to address refugee-related issues, including enactment of legislation, approval of national budgets, oversight of government activities and a leading role in shaping public opinion.
- Following an experts' review of its treaties and conventions, in July 2004 the **African Union** Summit of Heads of State confirmed the continuing relevance of the 1969 OAU Convention, and endorsed UNHCR's proposal to adopt an annual Decision on a specific theme related to refugees of particular concern to Member States. These decisions, which would have important political and moral value ("soft law"), would guide State practice on issues not adequately dealt with under existing international instruments. It is foreseen that the first Decision (2005) will deal with the preservation of the civilian and

humanitarian character of the institution of asylum and refugee settings, a theme of particular concern in Africa.

Assess the protection requirements of refugees and other persons of concern and analyse UNHCR and partner performance in regard to the provision of protection and assistance

- **Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (“Gap Analysis”)** : UNHCR is working on the Strengthening Capacity Project, funded by the European Union and three co-funding states. The project seeks to strengthen the capacity of refugee-hosting countries to protect refugees. Four countries have initially been selected for this project: Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania. The objectives include providing a comprehensive analysis of gaps in protection in each of the countries, making recommendations on strategies to bridge those gaps as identified through discussions among governments, UNHCR, international organizations, refugees, and civil society, and securing the political and financial support necessary to implement such strategies. (*Strategic Goal 3*).
- **Preparations for the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somali Refugees (CPA)** : Implementation of this project, funded by the EU under the budget line for cooperation with third countries in the area of refugees and migration, started in July 2004. Its expected outcome is the crafting of a CPA to enhance the provision of effective protection and assistance for Somali refugees and find durable solutions. The first phase of the project foresees a number of activities such as data collection and research, stakeholders meetings, registration and profiling, fact finding and programme formulation missions, periodic validation workshops, results publication and dissemination, and evaluation. It is expected that the CPA for Somalia will provide an effective tool to seek additional funding, both directly to UNHCR as well as to other agencies and partners, to implement the activities envisaged therein.

Strategic Goal 5: Seek durable solutions to the situation of refugees

- Voluntary repatriation continues to be a major thrust of UNHCR’s operations in Africa. The Office continued to raise the profile of protracted refugee situations and prioritize the need to find solutions to the underlying root causes of conflict and displacement in Africa. Of major concern to the Office is the deteriorating economic and social conditions in many African countries, which has led to tension and violence between communities. This is leading to continuing internal displacement and in some cases further refugee movements across borders. (*Objective 5.1*)
- To increase prospects for sustainable reintegration of returnees, the Office pursued solid partnerships with Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies in order to share responsibilities and agree upon the way forward. The "4Rs" (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) strategy is well underway in Sierra Leone, and progress has been made in Liberia, Angola and Burundi.
- UNHCR has continued to seek self-reliance for those refugees whose early return home is not an immediate prospect whilst also addressing the needs of their host communities, including through the "DLI" (Development through Local Integration) and “DAR” (Development Assistance for Refugees) concepts. (*Objective 5.2*)

- The Zambia Initiative has had a substantial impact on affected communities. In 2004, refugees and local persons involved in the Initiative produced adequate food to meet their household needs and surpluses for sale. The Initiative has received substantial support from many bilateral and multilateral donors, and has emerged as a model for other local integration programmes in Africa and beyond.
- In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNHCR is supporting Somali refugees with their application for citizenship following the Tanzanian Government's offer of naturalisation. Some of the 3,000 refugees however wish to return to Somalia. During the second half of 2004, UNHCR will prepare for the progressive phasing out of assistance to these refugees by ensuring that they have been accepted for local settlement and that they themselves have attained an acceptable level of self-reliance.
- In Uganda, after a Mid-Term Review in February 2004 that revealed a number of positive developments of the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), the Government of Uganda and UNHCR agreed to work towards the preparation of a new phase from SRS to Development Assistance to Refugee Hosting Areas (DAR), in line with the Convention Plus initiative.
- Resettlement needs identified by UNHCR in Africa, and quantified in the UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs for 2005, show that 16,750 persons, or 45.5 %, of the individual needs are in Africa. In addition, 16 of the 20 potential groups under discussion for group resettlement in 2005 are in Africa. Despite considerable improvement on resources and staffing, existing resources will not serve to meet all the resettlement needs in Africa in 2005. In order to meet resettlement needs without compromising programme integrity, all field offices in Africa have been directed to establish standard operating procedures for resettlement. Most recently, UNHCR has hired a consultant to assist with fraud awareness and establishment of anti-fraud measures. (*Objective 5.3*)

Enhancing gender-equality and participation

- UNHCR is pursuing the objective of empowering refugee women through mainstreaming gender equality in its programmes and activities. Following the progress report on the implementation of the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to refugee women communicated to the Standing Committee last June, the Bureau has urged country offices to review their strategies for reaching full implementation of these commitments, as the results so far are uneven. In fact, whereas in areas such as SGBV, registration and the involvement of refugee women in the management of food and non food items good progress has been made, in the area of management and leadership representation, documentation and delivery of sanitary napkins, substantial work remains to be done. UNHCR is also actively involved in the pilot mainstreaming process on age and gender. Two countries have already been successfully piloted, Zambia and Guinea, and the third one, Uganda, will be done in October. (*Strategic Goal 7*)

Partnerships – Build effective partnerships to better protect people of concern and ensure delivery of quality programmes

- UNHCR has undertaken a project to enhance capacity of African national and regional NGOs. The main purpose of the project is for UNHCR to be able to meet the protection and assistance needs of refugees and using local skills and resources wherever possible. A secondary purpose is to build NNGO capacity to work beyond the needs of a UNHCR operation and to contribute to longer-term rehabilitation and development, including the

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development of civil society. A pilot project has been undertaken to understand the capacity-building needs of partner NNGOs better and identify appropriate interventions which could best address some of these needs in four selected African countries, namely: Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Zambia; and to prioritize the needs of NNGOs. In addition, the pilot project would determine the gaps in the capacity of UNHCR offices and staff in the pilot countries to help the local partners develop institutionally.
(Strategic Goal 10)