

## **Update on UNHCR's Operations in Africa Executive Committee 2005**

### **Part A: Major developments**

- Despite a number of fluid political and security situations (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Zimbabwe), as well as unresolved conflicts in other parts of the continent (Darfur), a number of longstanding conflicts in Africa have ended or are in the process of being resolved (south Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone). This has provided large groups of refugees with a unique opportunity for voluntary repatriation, which remains at the top of UNHCR's agenda in Africa. Over half a million refugees in Africa will have returned home in 2005.
- In West Africa, UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of more than 38,000 Liberian refugees, provided material assistance and transportation for the return of 200,000 IDPs, and monitored conditions in areas of return. This positive development has been somewhat overshadowed by the crisis in Togo, where some 40,000 Togolese fled to Ghana and Benin due to the unrest that followed the April 2005 elections. The situation has not yet stabilized sufficiently to allow for major repatriation movements.
- Peace and security in the sub-region more generally remained of concern, particularly in view of the volatile situations in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Guinea Bissau. Longer-term strategies to address the problems of unemployed youth and regional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) are much needed.
- In the Great Lakes, the Burundi elections increased the prospects for reconciliation and sustainable peace and had an immediate effect on the number of returning refugees, particularly from the United Republic of Tanzania. Some 34,000 refugees have returned since the beginning of 2005, with about 15,000 returning during the month of August alone. The forced repatriation of about 5,000 Rwandan asylum-seekers from Burundi in June was of concern.
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, recent developments raise hopes for the repatriation of refugees to some areas of the country. UNHCR is facilitating voluntary repatriation to secure areas such as Equateur province. Almost 12,000 refugees have returned home in the context of the voluntary repatriation operations from the Central African Republic since October 2004 and from the Republic of the Congo since April 2005.
- Increasing insecurity in northern Central African Republic, and the absence of law and order enforcement mechanisms, have triggered the outflow of an increasing number of refugees, mainly to Chad, as well as some instability in the border area between Cameroon and the Central African Republic over the last months. The three Governments are working towards strengthening security in the area and in the Final Declaration that resulted from their meeting in Yaoundé on 25 and 26 August, they requested UNHCR's cooperation to provide assistance and support to refugees in the region. The international community has a critical role to play to avoid that the situation unravels into a major crisis.
- In the East and the Horn of Africa, the assisted repatriation of 240,000 refugees from Ethiopia to "Somaliland" by May 2005 enabled UNHCR to close seven out of the eight camps in eastern Ethiopia. Yet, the political and socio-economic landscape in Somalia poses many challenges, particularly in south and central Somalia where insecurity prevails.
- Uganda, which hosts nearly 240,000 mostly Sudanese refugees continued to receive new arrivals from neighbouring Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. In particular, some 18,000 Sudanese refugees have entered Uganda since the beginning of 2004 at an average rate of over a thousand a month claiming insecurity due to attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army, inter-ethnic positioning and lack of food in southern Sudan. Clashes in the Kivu and Ituri regions in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo caused the outflow of 20,000 people to Uganda during the course of the year. Around 12,000 of these have already returned home further to improved conditions in areas of origin.

- In Southern Africa the overall political stability allowed for a sustained shift of focus from crisis management to long-term development and durable solutions. Though the legal landscape remained generally friendly to refugees and asylum-seekers, the organization of several public order operations affected asylum-seekers and refugees.
- In Angola, the repatriation is ongoing with more repatriation corridors opened recently, despite low registration for return in Namibia and Zambia, due partly to concerns over elections planned for 2006 as well as the remaining obstacles for effective reintegration in some areas of return.

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

### Redoubling the search for durable solutions (Strategic Goal 5 AfP Goal 5)

- The search for durable solutions continued to be the driving force of UNHCR's activities in Africa throughout 2005. Voluntary repatriation remained the preferred durable solution for refugees in Africa and UNHCR continued to assist and facilitate the return of refugees mainly to Burundi, Liberia, safer parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Equateur), Angola, "Somaliland" and Rwanda.<sup>1</sup>
- Yet, in some countries of origin, such as Angola and the DRC, poor or no basic infrastructure and services in refugees' home areas are major obstacles to return and to sustainable reintegration. As a response, UNHCR, together with countries of origin and operational partners have stepped up efforts to improve conditions in areas of return by upgrading basic services, creating livelihood opportunities and, most importantly, supporting the reestablishment of law and order. The engagement of development actors in this field is crucial and longer-term development investment to ensure the sustainability of the return remains of concern in some cases, particularly in Sierra Leone.
- Enhanced returnee monitoring has also contributed to creating an environment for sustainable reintegration, especially in Liberia and Burundi, where UNHCR has increased its protection presence and entered into key partnerships with operational partners to ensure appropriate coverage in all areas of return. The need for successful DDR programmes cannot be underestimated in this context. In 2005, the Africa Bureau actively participated in various UN-led initiatives, such as the drafting of UN Guidelines on DDR, by contributing with its specific protection and reintegration expertise and experience.
- The promotion of self-reliance through UNHCR's operations, particularly in protracted situations, as a means to prepare refugees better for achieving durable solutions was one of the Office's major objectives during 2005. In Zambia, the Development through Local Integration "Zambia Initiative" enabled beneficiaries to become increasingly self-reliant, particularly with regard to food. Progress was also made in Uganda where the Government and UNHCR embarked on the Development Assistance for Refugees project for Sudanese refugees and host communities.
- The use of several assessment and planning tools and methodologies have contributed to focus UNHCR's programmes towards the achievement of durable solutions and promote refugees' self-reliance. For instance, the systematic use of standards and indicators, which was piloted in Africa in 2003 and implemented across the board in 2004, has started to yield tangible results in the first half of

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<sup>1</sup> See regional overview above. The Sudan situation is dealt with in a separate update.

2005. Many Representatives in Africa have appreciated the methodology to assess the needs of the refugees better, as well as to identify partners' contributions.

- Increased refugee participation in the planning process has also enabled UNHCR to include the contributions of refugees in planning for durable solutions, as well as to understand their needs and expectations better in this context. With the rollout to the field of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming process, it is expected to become an inherent element of all offices' planning exercises.
- Recent participatory assessments conducted in Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone highlighted that reductions in food rations as well as the lack of education and skill development opportunities are a major obstacle to empowering refugees for durable solutions and have increased the exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including prostitution and sexual exploitation. Similar impacts due to the reductions of food rations were reported in various countries in Africa. While the Office continues to undertake training and capacity-building initiatives to address SGBV and child protection issues in Africa, the High Commissioner is committed to redoubling efforts to tackle the malnutrition problem, particularly in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Ethiopia and Djibouti.
- Resettlement remains an integral part of a comprehensive approach to durable solutions, notwithstanding the successful repatriations throughout the continent. Efforts have been made to turn resettlement into a more responsive tool of protection, while becoming at the same time a more reliable durable solution, and a more meaningful expression of international solidarity and burden sharing. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to strike the appropriate balance between the three durable solutions, and especially between repatriation and resettlement. The Office is trying to address this challenge by ensuring that resettlement is part of comprehensive solution-planning from the onset.
- While new methodologies such as group resettlement and expedited procedures are proving to be useful, resettlements remains labour intensive and requires significant human resources. The support received from a number of countries in this respect, including the funding of additional staff, is highly appreciated. The deployment of Resettlement Consultants in Africa through the UNHCR-ICMC Deployment Scheme has further improved the staffing situation.
- The preparatory phase of a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Somalia has been completed. Discussions with governments on the formulation of the actual CPA based on the Gap Analysis and the National Consultations have started. This is expected to form the basis of an innovative approach for solutions to what has been one of the most protracted situations on the continent.
- UNHCR has been a particularly active player in the regional and sub-regional bodies and organizations and, as such, has made a consistent contribution to the work of NEPAD, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes, IGAD and ECOWAS to ensure that refugee rights, as well as reconstruction and sustainable reintegration, continue to be an integral and relevant part of the continent's peace and development agenda.