

**REGIONAL STRATEGIC PRESENTATION SUMMARY
TO 35TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING (7-9 March 2006)**

Bureau for Africa

Regional Overview

Part A: Introduction

The past year witnessed significant advances in the search for durable solutions, particularly for refugees in protracted situations in Africa. Peace, successfully brokered through a combination of determined African leadership and sustained international support, was further consolidated in careful and steady steps towards democratic governance. Opportunities were maximized across the continent, for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin. This was the case for refugees and IDPs from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, north-west Somalia and the Sudan. The option of third country resettlement was also made available for a significant number of African refugees. 2006 will see concerted efforts to maintain the momentum of returns to some countries and, in others, to refocus attention on reintegration activities or to bring operations to closure.

Alongside the positive developments, volatile situations with a high potential for conflict persist in different parts of the continent. A new outflow of refugees from Togo occurred in April/May 2005; insecurity generated by disparate armed groups in the Central African Republic (CAR) continues to cause displacement, both within the country and across the borders into Chad; and ongoing fighting in the Katanga and North Kivu Provinces of DRC has also resulted in further population displacements within the DRC and into Uganda. In all these situations, inter-agency emergency response mechanisms have been activated.

The truce in Côte d'Ivoire, painstakingly brokered in 2005, remains fragile and tenuous, as manifested in the recent violence against United Nations and other humanitarian agencies in the country. The relocation of aid workers from Guiglo made access to refugees more difficult. Humanitarian actors in neighbouring countries updated contingency plans for possible influxes of refugees. Other high-risk situations are being carefully monitored and emergency response capacities will continue to be strengthened in 2006.

The seemingly chronic disparity between growing needs and available resources continued to challenge UNHCR's ability to deliver on its protection, assistance and solutions responsibilities in Africa. Minimum levels of care for camp and urban-based refugees, according to UNHCR's standards and indicators, were not met. Increased vulnerability and exposure to protection risks are consequences faced primarily by refugee women and children. In some repatriation operations, most notably Burundi, reintegration assistance to returnee communities had to be reduced.

Secondary and irregular refugee movements, combined with conditions of abject poverty so prevalent on the continent, are producing increasing migratory flows from West, East, and the Horn of Africa as well as from Southern Africa, which will demand focused attention in 2006.

UNHCR's involvement with IDPs in Africa has usually taken the form of support towards their reintegration through community-based programmes implemented in main areas of refugee return. A marked shift in this position has been prompted by decisions taken in the framework of the Humanitarian Reform Initiative, notably the endorsement of the collaborative approach through clusters and the assignment to UNHCR of lead responsibility for the global clusters on protection,

camp coordination and management and emergency shelter. Thus in 2006, UNHCR is significantly extending its activities towards enhancing the protection of IDPs in Africa commencing in DRC, Liberia and Uganda, which were designated as pilot countries for the implementation of the cluster approach.

In Liberia, where UNHCR has assisted the voluntary return of some 300,000 IDPs since late 2004, efforts are now shifting towards support for remaining IDPs, extension of protection monitoring in areas of IDP return including reintegration support and closure and rehabilitation of camp sites ensuring that legal, environmental and other issues resulting from the long-term presence of IDP camps will be addressed. In DRC, UNHCR as the protection cluster lead is establishing inter-agency protection working group in six priority provinces. As of mid-February, with the support of temporary mission staff, four groups became operational and began to assess protection risks and design interventions to respond to urgent protection needs of IDP who have returned, remain in displacement, or are newly displaced. In Uganda, UNHCR leading the protection cluster, into which camp management issues have been subsumed, is proposing a new two-pronged strategy focusing on freedom of movement to address the long-standing IDP situation. This comprises facilitating voluntary returns to areas where conditions are conducive while also improving the conditions in the IDP camps. The continuation of these activities is dependent upon receipt of additional funds.

Part B: Progress on UNHCR strategic objectives for 2006 and implementation of the Agenda for Protection

Advocate for and support governments in the creation and maintenance of an international protection regime

UNHCR continued to support governments' efforts towards strengthening the international protection regime in Africa. In post-conflict settings, notably in Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone, UNHCR increased its efforts to work along with new governments to re-establish asylum systems in line with international standards.

In Djibouti, UNHCR is exploring the feasibility of conducting a verification/re-registration exercise using Project Profile in order to set up a database for the updating of ration cards and the issuance of ID cards. (*GSO #1; AfP 1.11*)

Significant efforts have been made to assist national authorities in enhancing their national asylum systems, which includes building capacity to implement effective, adequate and sustainable national Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures. In Cameroon, UNHCR took measures to strengthen its RSD capacity, while the Cameroonian authorities adopted a national refugee law in the second half of 2005. UNHCR reinforced its own RSD capacity through the use of RSD consultants and United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in various countries in Africa, which led to further support for national authorities in their RSD responsibilities. This support included but was not limited to training programmes for government officials on refugee law, funding of national RSD structures, and on-the-job RSD training. In Malawi, UNHCR assisted the Government to establish a dedicated RSD Unit that is expected to clear, by the end of 2006, a backlog of 4,500 pending asylum claims. Similar initiatives are planned for later this year in other countries in the Southern Africa region, including Mozambique and Namibia. (*GSO #1; AfP 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4*)

UNHCR provided advice and guidance to countries which are in the process of drafting new or revising existing national refugee law (e.g. CAR, Angola, Guinea Bissau, and the United Republic of Tanzania (Tanzania)). The need for further strengthening of national asylum laws and RSD procedures was also acknowledged during the regional Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)/UNHCR meeting on refugee issues, held in August 2005 in Gaborone. UNHCR will continue its support and advice to the governments concerned in the coming year.

In the framework of the Convention Plus initiative, a Strengthening Protection Capacity Project was initiated in Tanzania, Kenya, Benin and Burkina Faso in 2004. In all four countries, detailed analyses of protection gaps were conducted, followed by national consultations, bringing together all partners involved, including refugees, to discuss the gaps and the measures needed to address them. This process led to the development of a wide range of projects, some of which secured donor funding and commenced implementation in 2005. (*AfP 1.2*)

Ensure that international standards of protection for girls, boys, women and men of concern to UNHCR are met

In 2005, UNHCR worked closely with governments and operational partners, as well as with refugees to improve protection, with particular focus on the registration and documentation of refugees, application of the gender, age and diversity mainstreaming approach and prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).

In Liberia, UNHCR, in collaboration with national authorities, completed the individual registration and the documentation of Sierra Leonean and Ivorian refugees through the roll-out of Project Profile. This registration system also represents a key protection measure for UNHCR to reinvigorate the search for durable solutions and self-reliance opportunities through an accurate profiling of the refugee population. In Southern Africa, all refugees and asylum-seekers in Botswana, Mozambique and Malawi have been individually registered and provided with documentation under a region-wide initiative supported by UNHCR. Thus, five of eight operations in the sub-region now conduct individual registration of all refugees. (*AfP 1.11, 6.1*)

Operations in Africa continued to dedicate efforts towards fuller implementation in 2005 of the High Commissioner's Five Commitments towards Refugee Women. The reports on the Great Lakes and the Southern Africa regions show that all countries have made considerable efforts to implement the Commitments, but also that significant gaps remain in several areas. Four of the seven countries in the Southern Africa region with refugee camps report at least 40 per cent female representation in management committees. In Rwanda and Tanzania, for example, 50 per cent of the members of food distribution committees for refugees are women and, in Burundi, women are represented at 50 per cent in camp management committees. In other countries, parity has not yet been achieved in all refugee environments (camp and urban).

In West Africa, 70 per cent of the countries have established Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the prevention of and response to SGBV. In Guinea, a plan of action for SGBV prevention and response was elaborated and operationalized in a collaborative effort involving partners and refugee communities. Sensitization campaigns are conducted as well as training on human rights and women's rights. Regrettably, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) continues despite the sensitization campaigns carried out among the population.

In Ghana, the Office supported training on the prevention of and response to SGBV for the refugee community, police personnel and members of the refugees' Neighbourhood Watch Teams. Service providers targeted in SGBV training and sensitization included UNHCR staff as well as other implementing partners' staff, law enforcement and settlement management personnel, and social welfare services. A reporting and referral mechanism for all cases of SGBV is in place and ensures that survivors receive medical, legal, psychosocial and material support. (*AfP 4.4*)

The age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy was rolled out in 2005 in another 12 countries, bringing the total to 15 countries in which the roll-out has been completed since the start in 2004. Another sixteen to eighteen countries are planned for 2006.

As a result of the participatory assessments in Guinea and Sierra Leone, UNHCR launched programmes of vocational and "life skills" training (including reproductive health) for adolescent-at-risk girls and boys in order to address teen pregnancies, school dropouts and juvenile delinquency. In

Benin, Burkina Faso and Nigeria, the participatory assessment led to the finalization of plans of action that are under implementation in 2006 for better support to communities and increased vocational skills development. (*AfP 3.4*)

In the case of Zambia, specific measures already adopted as a result of the AGDM initiative include the recruitment of a female police officer in Mayukwayuka camp (in process); campaigns to encourage children to remain in school; the temporary restoration of food rations to previously self-sufficient refugees in drought-stricken areas; and a boosting of income-generation activities targeted at women. (*GSO #6; AfP 6*)

In Angola, more than 16,000 women in rural returnee communities have been sensitized on their rights under an empowerment initiative. Particular progress has been made in empowering women to participate in the elections planned for later this year, including both the right to vote and to present themselves as candidates.

Pursue voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, resettlement or local integration for refugees, with a special focus on those in protracted refugee situations

In the Great Lakes region, UNHCR continued the facilitation of voluntary repatriation to Burundi. The pace of return peaked in August 2005 with 15,000 returnees before drastically declining to 1,200 in December 2005. In total, 68,000 refugees returned home in 2005, mainly from Tanzania. UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of 66,424 of them. Returns are expected to continue in 2006, albeit at a reduced rate due to, among other reasons, food shortages resulting from drought conditions in Burundi. Returns of refugees to DRC continued from the Republic of the Congo, CAR and Tanzania. 2005 saw a total of 46,000 Congolese refugees return home spontaneously and with UNHCR's assistance (13,785). DRC, for the last couple of years, has also been organizing returns to Rwanda and Angola and is preparing for both repatriation to southern Sudan and reception of Congolese refugees from Juba. Successful voter registration and peaceful conduct of a referendum on the draft constitution were major positive developments in the DRC. The national elections, planned for April 2006, will test the resolve of the Congolese people to stay the course of peaceful transition. Nonetheless, the volatile situations mainly in the Kivus and Katanga, coupled with the deterioration of security in CAR, dictate that countries in the region maintain and strengthen their emergency preparedness and response capacities.

Organized repatriation to southern Sudan was formally started with small movements from Kenya and, more recently, from CAR. Preparations are under way to organize further movements also from DRC, Ethiopia and Uganda.

Political and economic progress in north-west Somalia, and the efforts directed towards achieving a resolution to the Somalia conflict, translated into significant voluntary repatriation movements of Somalis from Ethiopia and Djibouti. In 2005, a total of 13,423 refugees were assisted to return from Djibouti and Ethiopia to north-west Somalia.

Around 200,000 Liberians have returned home since the beginning of the facilitation phase in October 2004, of whom over 46,000 returned with UNHCR's assistance, mainly during 2005. Following the successful electoral process in Liberia, in 2006 UNHCR shifted from the facilitation to the promotion of repatriation.

UNHCR concluded in December 2005 its organized repatriation operation for camp-based Angolan refugees in DRC, Zambia and Namibia, under which more than 210,000 refugees were assisted to return home over the course of three years. UNHCR is preparing to support the return of spontaneously settled refugees in DRC and Zambia and to explore options for alternative solutions for remaining groups in 2006.

In tandem with the significant strides towards peace, UNHCR increased its efforts to ensure sustainable reintegration, to consolidate peace and to find durable solutions for remaining refugees. Asylum fatigue and protracted refugee situations demand a comprehensive approach to durable solutions, which includes addressing difficulties with balancing repatriation and resettlement, as well as reticence towards local integration.

Solution strategies for protracted situations, such as the Mauritanian refugees in Senegal and Mali, are further deserving of priority attention in collaboration with the CASWANAME Bureau.

Resettlement has proven to be a valuable protection tool in the region. In addition, it continues to serve as a useful tool for achieving durable solutions for refugees in various countries, such as Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. In 2005, UNHCR made some 14,880 resettlement submissions for refugees in Africa submitted a total of some 14,880 refugees for resettlement. (*AfP 5.1, 5.5*)

Progress has equally been made towards local integration of Somali Bantus in Tanzania, where 182 were naturalized while 1,040 applications are still pending. In Guinea the Government has offered to locally integrate and grant citizenship to a remaining group of Sierra Leonean refugees. This project, which has already registered some success, could eventually serve as a pilot for the local integration of Liberian refugees who may opt to remain in Guinea. Building upon past activities, strategies to fully explore possibilities for all three durable solutions will be designed or strengthened in 2006 with particular focus on protracted situations of Rwandans, Burundians, Congolese (RoC and DRC), Somalis and Angolans (*GSO #3; AfP 5.4*). The main obstacle to local integration in the southern African region has been the inability of refugees to convert their refugee status to an alternative status of a more permanent nature. Specific interventions addressing this problem will be designed and implemented starting in 2006.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the different transition processes, UNHCR is strengthening its partnerships with development agencies, particularly UNDP, to reinforce early recovery capacities as a means to increase the sustainability of reintegration activities. Moreover, UNHCR is endeavouring to improve collaboration with regional organizations including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the SADC in order to strengthen the protection of refugees and other persons of concern in Africa and the search for durable solutions. (*GSO #3; GSO #6; AfP 5.3*)

Pursue management reform to enhance the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of UNHCR's operations

In Africa, as voluntary repatriation operations are completed, UNHCR will continuously review the structure of offices and its presence in the various sub-regions. Full account will be taken of national capacities to support the protection of refugees.