

Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa Executive Committee 2006

Part A: Major developments

- General conditions of stability in various parts of the continent in 2006 allowed UNHCR to continue voluntary repatriation operations, the major ones being Liberia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Sudan. The truce signed at the end of August between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army opened new scenarios for the stabilization of the area, which could boost the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin. Although free elections in DRC raised hopes for a positive resolution of conflicts in the region, the situation remained dramatically uncertain after the first round of the electoral process.
- Pockets of instability in DRC, southern Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire hampered repatriation movements, while increasing insecurity in the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Darfur in western Sudan, and Somalia caused further displacement.
- In Darfur, the precarious security environment put the humanitarian operations in the area at risk, while displacement of populations continued due to conflict and serious violations of human rights. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), which was signed in Abuja on 5 May 2006, did not result in the expected cessation of hostilities. On the contrary, the agreement has been followed by an increase in armed confrontations, particularly between the rebel factions which signed and those that did not sign the DPA. In Chad, the dramatic military escalation between government and rebel forces continued to pose threats to the security of refugees, IDPs, and humanitarian staff, triggering further displacement of some 15,000 Chadian nationals to West Darfur and around 50,000 within Chad itself.
- Growing insecurity in northern CAR forced more than 20,000 persons to cross the border into Cameroon and 7,000 into Chad since the beginning of the year, bringing the total number of CAR refugees in southern Chad to 50,000. Additionally, an estimated 50,000 persons have been forcibly displaced in the north of the country.
- Increasing tensions in Somalia between the Supreme Council of the Islamic Courts and the Transitional Federal Government raised fears of large scale military confrontation that could cause mass displacement of people within Somalia and into neighbouring countries, particularly Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda. Already some 20,000 Somalis have crossed into Kenya since the beginning of the year due to drought and conflict. The rapid and unexpected change of the situation in Somalia prompted UNHCR to consider a reorientation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somalia towards a strategy focused on the current realities of Somalia that would take into account worst case scenarios, including all necessary protection and assistance interventions for effective humanitarian response to situations of potential, large scale internal and external displacements.
- UNHCR's involvement with IDPs, in the context of the inter-agency cluster approach, gained momentum as UNHCR consolidated its role as cluster lead agency for areas under its responsibility in the selected four pilot countries (DRC, Liberia, Somalia, and Uganda). In these countries, UNHCR has been instrumental in leading advocacy efforts and in developing strategies and projects aimed at enhancing the protection of IDPs. The

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has also recently endorsed the establishment of the Protection Cluster in Côte d'Ivoire under the leadership of UNHCR. UNHCR offices in CAR, Chad and Sudan were equally involved in inter-agency activities on behalf of IDPs.

- Secondary movements and migratory flows, particularly in the Southern African region as well as from West and Eastern Africa to Europe and the Arabic peninsula increased the concerns about the impact that mixed flows could have on the institution of asylum.
- UNHCR enhanced its cooperation with the African Union (AU) by contributing to the Special Summit of the AU on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Abuja in May 2006, and to the AU Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Burkina Faso at the end of June 2006. In an effort to strengthen collaboration to ensure adequate support for voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Liberian refugees, UNHCR and WFP organized a Regional Strategic Meeting in Freetown, Sierra Leone. UNHCR and UNDP completed a joint desk review of their cooperation in six African countries, namely Burundi, Liberia, DRC, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda with the aim of improving collaboration in the area of sustainable reintegration of returnees and early recovery.
- The process of prioritization of interventions and adoption of austerity measures, dictated by the acute financial constraints of the organization, resulted in reduced budgets and limited activities in support of refugees, often far below minimum standards of protection and assistance, particularly in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation.
- UNHCR carried out a systematic process of consolidation of its offices and structures to respond to changing operational requirements on the ground, reflecting progress in repatriation operations and budgetary adjustments. Among other measures, the Chad and Sudan Special Unit at Headquarters was reintegrated into the Regional Bureau for Africa. 18 offices will be closed and 326 posts discontinued in Africa by the end of 2006.

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

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

- For most of the Liberian refugees in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ghana; Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania; and Sudanese and DRC refugees in a number of neighbouring countries, voluntary repatriation remained the main durable solution. UNHCR was engaged in negotiations with host governments and countries of origin to advance the planning and implementation of voluntary repatriation operations. UNHCR also discussed with host governments options for local integration of refugees opting to remain in asylum countries, especially Angolans in DRC, Zambia and Namibia; DRC refugees in Angola; Sierra Leoneans in Guinea and Liberia; and Liberians in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Resettlement was also strategically pursued as a protection measure and a durable solution. Some 9,760 refugees, mostly from Liberia, Burundi, Somalia and DRC, have been referred for resettlement since the beginning of the year.
- UNHCR has facilitated the repatriation of some 26,300 Liberian refugees since March 2006 (more than 35,000 since the beginning of the year). The repatriation process gained momentum, in particular from Guinea and Sierra Leone, with the shift from the

facilitation to the promotion phase in February 2006. UNHCR's Office in Benin facilitated the voluntary return of 1,055 Togolese refugees and registered 600 additional voluntary repatriation requests. On 20 June 2006, UNHCR shifted from the facilitation to the active promotion of voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees. Around 17,000 refugees have returned to Burundi with UNHCR's assistance since March 2006, with a significant peak in August. In the DRC, around 22,000 refugees returned to their places of origin with UNHCR assistance since the beginning of the year. However, the return process to DRC proceeded at slow pace mainly for reasons related to the uncertainty of the electoral process, logistical constraints, lack of adequate reintegration opportunities in the areas of return and security problems in eastern DRC. Repatriation to southern Sudan continued in 2006 with movements from Kenya, Ethiopia, CAR, DRC and Uganda, although sporadic insecurity in return areas and along repatriation routes negatively affected operations. Around 11,000 Sudanese repatriated, although many others fled to Uganda and Kenya mainly due to security concerns, lack of educational opportunities, food shortages and poor or non-existing infrastructures. In Southern Africa, although the Zambia-Angola-UNHCR Tripartite Commission agreed in March 2006 to resume the repatriation of camp-based Angolans from Zambia until the end of the year, returns did not take place as expected.

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

- UNHCR continued to support governments in their efforts to improve national protection systems, in line with international instruments. In 2006, Uganda adopted national refugee legislation and Djibouti acceded to the 1969 OAU Convention.
- The Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) programme has been implemented in 35 countries in Africa (15 since March 2006) and the roll-out is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2006. As a follow-up to the participatory assessments, most offices established multi-functional teams that conducted annual participatory assessments and reviewed sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) programmes.
- Efforts have continued to sensitize refugee women on the High Commissioner Five Commitments for Refugee Women. In West Africa, refugee committees comprised around 25 to 30 per cent refugee women. All refugee women of reproductive age in camps in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria were regularly supplied with sanitary materials. In Liberia, Burundi and DRC, all returnee women received sanitary material kits upon arrival to destination. Budgetary constraints often limited the supply chain of sanitary kits.
- UNHCR focused on promoting HIV-AIDS prevention activities, especially through life skills training, capacity building, and the distribution of Information-Education-Communication (IEC) materials. New programmes, such as voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), provision of antiretroviral therapy (ART), as well as special care to vulnerable people, were applied also in the context of voluntary repatriation operations.

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