

# A critical time for the environment

A decade ago the then High Commissioner Sadako Ogata told a global conference that the “relationship between refugees and the environment has long been overlooked.”

In what was then probably the most comprehensive

ties. Educational programs via eco-clubs, classroom lectures and local theatre explain both problems and solutions to refugees, local communities and government officials. The agency and famed scientist Jane Goodall are exploring the possibility of introducing her popular Roots and Shoots club concept in refugee camps.

Reforestation and tree planting are cornerstones of UNHCR's efforts, but other activities range from simple gardening techniques, the introduction of energy saving stoves, supporting local game wardens to employing high tech satellite imagery.

More needs to be done, both in practical terms and in recognizing the importance of the issue. Environmental projects are often still regarded as ‘luxuries’ to be implemented only when more urgent matters are attended to when, in fact, eco-related problems can be highly political and spill over into protection, security, food and health fields.

Programs are expensive. Manpower resources are scarce, but this is a particularly critical time in the refugee environmental cycle. In the Horn of Africa more than 30 camps are scheduled to close in the near future and the refugee agency will undertake one of its most ambitious cleanup operations.

As hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees return home as many as 200 sites in Pakistan, which hosted millions of Afghans for many years, may need rehabilitating. Afghanistan itself is gripped by another drought which will affect millions of people.

If Mrs. Ogata raised the alarm a decade ago, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers recently re-emphasized the message that if environmental problems are ignored, this could jeopardize the very institution of asylum.



UNHCR/A. HOLLMANN/CS-RWA-1994

**Overcrowded camps = environmental degradation.**

policy statement on the subject, Mrs. Ogata not only underlined the obvious link between large scale refugee flight and ecological destruction, but also noted that civilians were often forced to flee in the first place because of environmental degradation and the battle for natural resources.

The war in Sierra Leone, for instance, was one of the most vicious of modern times in which tens of thousands of persons were killed and even larger numbers became refugees and was partially ignited by the battle for control of the country's vast diamond wealth.

Ogata promised UNHCR would become more involved and in the intervening 10 years environmental issues in general have become more ‘newsworthy’. A world summit on the environment and sustainable development will be held in South Africa later this year.

UNHCR programs now cover a wide range of activi-

*Correction: In issue N° 126, the quote attributed to Christine Mougne on page 6 should read: "It hadn't entered anybody's mind that 30 percent of all heads of family were women and girls."*



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UNHCR/P. CHALASANI/CS+ETH+1998



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*The relationship between refugees and the environment  
in which they survive has reached a particularly critical period*

# LIVING on





by Ray Wilkinson

It is one of the world's most stunning landscapes. Endless savannah grasslands, dotted with the graceful silhouettes of giraffe and ponderous elephants, shade into deep lakes and simmering volcanoes which spike broodingly into the African sky. Hopelessly overcrowded villages and the last great concentration of mountain gorillas cling precariously, side by side, to mountain slopes. Peeling waterside mansions recall the corruption of 19th century colonialism and despotic 20th century post-colonial tyrants.

Hundreds of thousands of terrified people spilled into this region in 1994. Fleeing one of modern history's worst atrocities—the killing fields of Rwanda—they set the stage for another spectacular collision, this time between man and his environment.

On the plains of Tanzania vast cities sprung up virtually overnight as refugees cowered in hastily airlifted tents, flimsy twig huts or simply in hollows scooped into the ground. In the shadows of still rumbling volcanoes, other refugees perched atop and in the fissures of ancient lava flows, the ash so hard even dynamite had no impact on its surface. In neighboring Zaire (today the Democratic Republic of Congo) towns such as Goma and Bukavu were overwhelmed by frenzied and then exhausted hordes of frightened exiles.

Armies of men, women and children slashed and felled millions of trees in the

# the **EDGE**



“THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REFUGEES AND THE ENVIRONMENT HAS LONG BEEN OVERLOOKED.”

## LIVING *on the* EDGE

- ▶ previously virgin forests of Zaire’s Virunga National Park, Africa’s oldest game sanctuary, in a daily search for fuel. In the Kagera region of northwest Tanzania, refugees consumed more than 1,200 tons of wood per day. Local gunmen, poachers and refugees trapped or shot out wildlife, including the gorillas.

### A WATERSHED

Such mass flights of civilians always have a major impact on the surrounding countryside in which they seek safety. But unlike earlier exoduses, events in Africa’s Great Lakes region in the mid-1990s proved an environmental watershed of sorts.

UNHCR’s Japanese High Commissioner Sadako Ogata had set the stage in 1992 with possibly the most comprehensive statement

up to that time linking the scourge of environmental degradation and refugees.

She expanded the debate before the special U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, noting that though it was already well known refugee movements could lead to ecological destruction, environmental degradation often set the whole cruel cycle in motion as civilians increasingly were forced to flee in the first place because of this phenomenon.

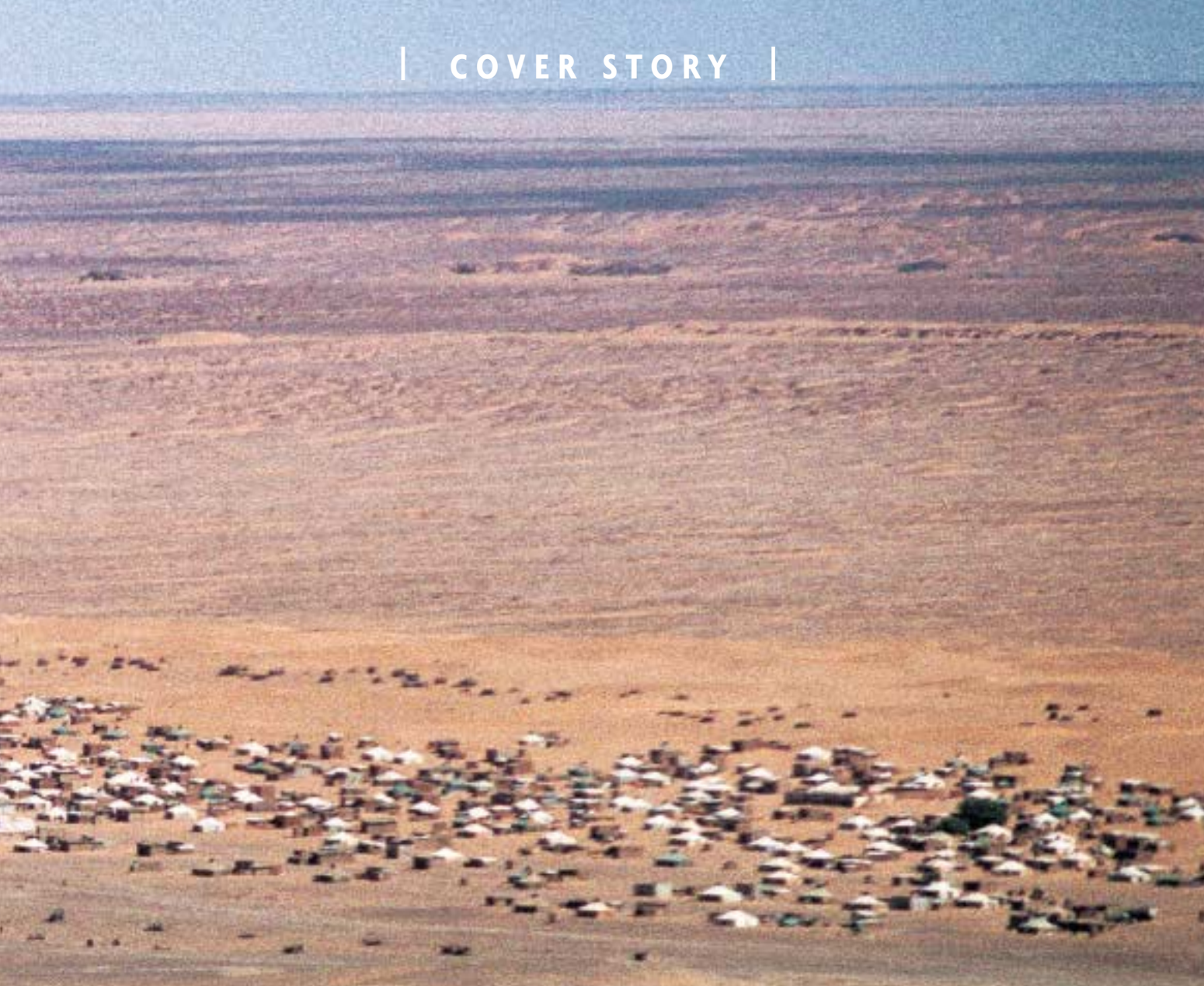
“This relationship between refugees and the environment has long been overlooked,” she said, pledging her agency to a much more comprehensive involvement.

Rwanda highlighted the problem to a global audience. The orgy of death was the most well-documented genocide in history. Huge numbers of terrified people

then fled the killing fields into an extremely beautiful but fragile ecosystem where their ongoing plight was covered by an unprecedented media blitz. Those facts, plus a generally heightened awareness of environmental concerns resulted, perhaps for the first time, in a widespread international recognition of the refugee-ecology link.

Billions of dollars worth of regular aid—food, water, shelter, medicines—were trucked and flown into the stricken region even as thousands of persons died from exhaustion, cholera and other disease. And when it became clear the refugees would be staying for months or years rather than weeks, humanitarian organizations also turned their attention to some burgeoning environmental headaches.





**Refugees** in Western Sahara.

To prevent the further destruction of Zaire's forests, UNHCR hired 100 trucks to haul commercial firewood to the camps for cooking and poured \$2.5 million into a similar project in Tanzania.

In addition to such 'normal' programs as planting trees, providing fuel-efficient stoves or helping people grow crops, the refugee agency promoted other unusual projects.

It financed the retraining and re-equipping of park rangers to protect invaluable flora and the mountain gorillas and helped to rehabilitate a local volcano observatory, which, among other things, tracked the ominous rumblings of nearby Mount Nyiragongo. The volcano did not explode then, but earlier this year a vast sea of molten lava finally spewed down its sides, virtu-

ally burying Goma town and forcing tens of thousands of panicked civilians to flee.

**GOING GLOBAL**

Even as field workers grappled with the uncertainties of African volcanoes and disappearing rain forests, the refugee agency went 'global' in 1996, issuing its first all-embracing Environmental Guidelines.

These recognized that "While traditional UNHCR activities have succeeded in... sustaining refugee populations, there has been an increasing realization that the negative environmental impacts associated with refugee situations must be better understood and dealt with."

Mass flight, the guidelines acknowledged, could destroy entire ecosystems and economic infrastructures, seriously harm-

ing not only refugees but local populations as well and causing a widening ripple effect of social, economic and political chaos. The guidelines offered general advice on how to prevent or alleviate these problems.

Underlining the increasing importance of the issue, the Japanese government funded the appointment of three successive senior environmental coordinators at the organization's Geneva headquarters.

That program lapsed several years ago, highlighting the dilemma that no matter how worthy the cause, programs do not automatically prosper in an increasingly complex and competitive humanitarian world.

Projects can be expensive at a time when budgets are shrinking. The rehabilitation of refugee camps in Africa alone could cost as much as \$150 million annually. Environ- ▶



# A most necessary item for survival...

*It's invaluable, expensive... and controversial*

UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS+KEN+2002



**Vulnerable women receive a distribution of free firewood.**

It is probably the most precious commodity in a refugee's survival kit. Millions need it to help them eat. Others use it to ward off the sub-zero night time temperatures of a Balkan or Russian winter's night. The reconstruction of Afghanistan is dependent on it.

Which is why so much controversy surrounds the procurement and delivery of wood. Timber is not only invaluable, it is also expensive and has been at the center of innumerable environmental and political debates ranging from the destruction of virgin forestland to the prevention of refugee camp rape.

The majority of people in developing countries use wood to cook so whenever large refugee camps are established an immediate priority is to locate a source of timber. When waves of terrified people fled Rwanda to Tanzania and Zaire in the 1990s they solved the problem by raiding nearby game reserves and slashing through hundreds of square miles of forest.

Aid agencies attempted to halt the destruction by trucking in supplies, but the operations proved prohibitively expensive and only partially successful.

In Europe, millions of dollars were spent to buy and import heating wood for Kosovar refugees in 1999 and millions more have been earmarked to purchase wood from as far away as South Africa and Tanzania to help in Afghanistan's massive rebuilding program.

But many projects involving wood, no matter how well intentioned, become cautionary tales as well.

When Somalia collapsed in the early 1990s many civilians fled to the semi-arid landscape of neighboring Kenya and settled in a complex of three camps known as Dadaab.

Women and girls spent their days scouring the nearby bush

for firewood, but the area was also full of armed gangs intent on rape.

## **FIREWOOD PROGRAM**

In an attempt to cut down on the number of sexual assaults by reducing the trips females made outside the camps and to lessen the environmental impact of their wood gathering excursions, the United States financed a \$1.5 million firewood program to provide families with around 30 percent of their cooking needs free.

UNHCR is currently spending \$800,000 to continue the project which is nevertheless mired in controversy.

One recent study concluded there had been little long-term environmental damage and that, carefully managed, there was enough firewood within a 30-kilometer radius to supply the refugees' needs.

A second study doubted the project's effectiveness in combating rape. While there was indeed a 45 percent decrease in the number of firewood related rapes at the time free wood was being distributed, it noted, there was a corresponding increase of between 78% and 113% in rapes in other locations and contexts.

Critics of the program argued the funds could be used more effectively in promoting greater camp security and community and cultural awareness about the issues.

That approach, however, elicited howls of protest from refugee women, local officials and businessmen.

That approach, however, elicited howls of protest from refugee women, local officials and businessmen.

At one meeting, a shaken UNHCR official said, "The women were extremely vocal, shouting insults, talking about human rights and insisting the program was working. I think they wanted to lynch us."

The locals were equally indignant in defending the project. In a dirt-poor region, the firewood program is the biggest employer and it is a lucrative business for

contractors. If it were halted for any reason, there would be a major impact on the local community as well as on the refugees.

These differing concerns all stem from the need to manage natural resources in a more rational manner. "This is like a high-wire act," one aid official said. "It's very difficult to keep your balance between all the competing parties and it would be so easy to fall off the wire."

*Many projects involving wood, no matter how well intentioned, become cautionary tales as well.*

## ► **LIVING** on the **EDGE**

mental schemes were viewed in the past with suspicion, as ‘luxuries’ to be implemented only when more urgent projects had been completed—an attitude which is still widespread today within UNHCR and the humanitarian community.

Manpower as well as financial resources remain in short supply. Within the refugee agency there is one full-time environmental expert in Geneva and

people say what you are offering is a drop in the sea. We appreciate that drop since we are optimists.” But he then added, in apparent contradiction, “We want lots of money and lots of action.”

West and central Africa faced the opposite problem to the Horn. As East Africa wrestled with camp rehabilitation and resettling returning refugees into fragile ecosystems, Liberia, Congo and surrounding regions were gripped by ongoing conflict, renewed flights of refugees

everything ranging from individual village homes and fields to factories and hospitals needing to be rebuilt from scratch. In an indication of how one environmental disaster can cause global ripple effects, Afghanistan is so short of wood millions of dollars worth of timber will be imported from as far away as South Africa and Tanzania to help rebuild the country.

Refugees and their environment may have only a modest impact on the earth’s overall physical well-being, but a recently

## FLEEING ONE OF HISTORY’S WORST ATROCITIES IN RWANDA, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE SET THE STAGE FOR ANOTHER SPECTACULAR COLLISION, THIS TIME BETWEEN MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT.

around 20 part-time experts in the field. An age-old debate continues on just who should be responsible for environmental projects—humanitarian or development organizations—especially when programs such as reforestation may continue for years after the departure of the last refugees.

### **HOT POTATO**

The environment has become a political hot potato with some governments increasingly vocal in their demand that the international community must foot the bill for cleanup and rehabilitation projects even when it is unclear if refugees were the cause of the degradation in the first place.

Such dilemmas come at a particularly critical time in the refugee environmental cycle. In the Horn of Africa, a perennial hothouse of war and exodus, more than 30 camps are scheduled to close as hundreds of thousands of people return home and UNHCR undertakes one of its most ambitious cleanup operations ever.

In Sudan, Africa’s largest country, as much as \$10 million was earmarked for operations and Bellings Sikanda, head of the agency’s operations in Showak in the eastern part of the country said, “We are now at a crossroads here. The refugee program is beginning to wind down and we are leaving. But there is still a price tag to this.”

Reflecting the political sensitivity of the debate, Bushra el Amin, the government’s leading coordinator told REFUGEES “Some

and all of the environmental headaches produced by war.

Across the globe, hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees also began to go home, presenting massive environmental challenges on several fronts. As many as 200 sites in Pakistan, which hosted millions of Afghans for many years, may need cleaning up.

Afghanistan itself is an economic and environmental nightmare with literally

released 450-page report entitled Global Environmental Outlook, painted a very bleak picture for the future unless everyone—governments, big business and organizations—radically changed their ways.

More than 1,000 scientists warned that living species, entire ecosystems, especially forests, could continue to disappear at an alarming rate and more than half the world will be affected by water shortages. As former High Commissioner Ogata ►



**Zambia has begun to encourage the local integration of refugees, one of the few countries to do so these days.**



## ► **LIVING** *on the* **EDGE**

warned in her 1992 speech, millions of refugees are 'born' by such ongoing degradation and may then go on to exacerbate the degradation themselves in their search for safety.

A world summit on sustainable development will discuss these issues later this year in South Africa.

### **ON THE EDGE**

It is early spring in eastern Sudan and temperatures are already in the 50s—so hot it is like walking into a Turkish bath where the steam has turned into solid clouds of heat. Dust tornadoes swirl across the drab, flat grey-brown landscape and just as suddenly disappear into the slate-grey sky. Cattle and goat carcasses dot the horizon. They die where they drop. Nothing can be done to save them.

Around every settlement and town, low-lying spiky scrub trees are draped, like Christmas trees for the terribly poor, with millions of discarded plastic bags—a dreary reminder of the excess of human consumption and its impact on a delicate ecosystem. Rusting farm machines and abandoned silos are monuments to a failed experiment to 'make the desert bloom' and turn the region into the breadbasket for the entire Middle East.

Most of the country's estimated 120,000 Eritrean refugees live in this region. In the 1980s, more than one million uprooted people from some of the nine countries which share borders with Sudan took refuge here. There are an additional five million Sudanese who have been displaced by civil conflict in their own country—the highest figure in the world. War seems to be a 'constant' in this area.

Not all of the 20 million uprooted persons UNHCR currently cares for live in such harsh surroundings, of course. Conditions for refugees are as variable as the climate in different parts of the world and a converted military barracks somewhere in Europe may seem almost deluxe in comparison to the east African savannah.

But the great majority do live on the very edge of survivability. Uprooted peoples often escape from the world's poorest nations and take sanctuary in equally destitute countries. They are sometimes housed in uninhabited parts of a country where there is little or no infrastructure or on land which locals long ago decided was too difficult to tame.

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**High resolution satellite imagery** captures the Beldangi refugee camp in Nepal and its surrounding forests and mountains.

The severity of the landscape in eastern Sudan, northern Kenya or parts of Pakistan is a stark reminder of a fact so glaring that it is often overlooked or ignored—refugees and the environment encompass far more than a project to replant a forest or clean up a deserted camp. Virtually every problem faced by refugees and the organizations trying to help them has an ‘environmental’ connection.

### **NARROW FOCUS**

“We tend to look at the ‘environment’ through a very narrowly focused telescope,” says Sergio Calle-Noreña, who is not an environmental expert himself but a senior UNHCR protection officer in Kenya. “The environment involves politics, protection, security, food and health—very obvious really when you think about it, but people often don’t connect all the dots.”

Women refugees in the Dadaab complex of camps in eastern Kenya, for instance, were terrorized for years when they had to scavenge for firewood in the bush. Their protection, security and health were all severely compromised (see *story page 8*). Polluting scarce water points or using ‘green’ firewood cause serious health problems. The scarcity of wood and the inability to cook food, even if it is available, lead to malnutrition and other diseases.

The battle for resources can lead to social and political turmoil. Difficulties between refugees and local communities invariably fall into this category. Some governments, especially in Africa, used to welcome refugees, giving them plots of land and sometimes citizenship. But as the numbers increased over the decades and refugees stayed longer, new arrivals were not allowed to ‘integrate’ with local communities and support themselves on donated farmland, but were confined to overcrowded camps.

Though such moves were designed to take the pressure off natural resources and appease local communities, they often had the opposite effect as the refugees were forced to forage, often against the law, for scarce resources such as firewood and crops.

In a move to counter that trend, Zambia recently announced a pilot project in which some of the nearly 300,000 refugees the country supports will be integrated into local communities and



## ► **LIVING** *on the* **EDGE**

given land to produce crops for both domestic use and export. The move was partially designed to counter prevailing attitudes summed up by one local chief, who said, “We thought the refugees were (only) here to cut down our trees and use our water.”

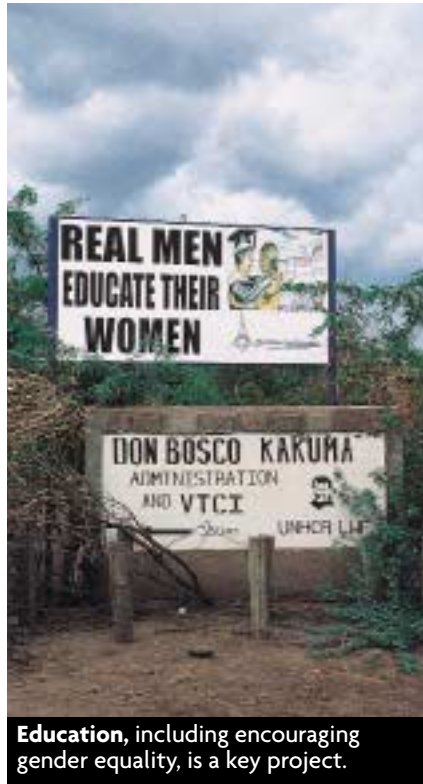
### **GOOD, BAD, UGLY**

The history of both economic and environmental projects in the developing world entered journalistic folklore many years ago—encompassing as they do the extremes of the good, the bad and the ugly.

Projects range from the latest technology wizardry to the most down-to-earth and time-tested of programs.

Environmental education is the most basic tool encouraging, explaining and cajoling refugees, especially children, local people and government officials through eco-clubs, classroom lectures, literature and local theatre.

Tree planting and reforestation, especially in semi-desert regions, have become



**Education, including encouraging gender equality, is a key project.**

UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS+KEN/2002

the cornerstones of environmental programs. In one of the most ambitious projects of its kind, the World Bank in conjunction with UNHCR and other organizations spent \$80 million in the 1990s to rehabilitate forests in Pakistan

Green belts increasingly surround camps in the arid Horn of Africa and regenerate despoiled areas in the tropical central African regions, improving soil conservation, restoring biological diversity, providing building and cooking resources and shade.

A myriad of other projects have been introduced. High tech satellite imagery and GPS (global positioning systems) can chart refugee movements, camp locations and any environmental destruction.

At the low tech end of the scale, so-called multi-storey gardening may be a partial answer in overcrowded camps, refugees needing only a burlap bag some tin cans and a little soil to produce bumper crops in confined spaces. Rwandan refugees in northern Uganda use ubiquitous termite mounds to help turn their waste into useful fertilizer and others

# Environmental migrants and refugees

*Millions of people flee because of famine or floods but should they be considered as refugees?*

**T**here are currently 12 million refugees around the world. There are approximately double that number of people who have fled because of floods, famine and other environmental disasters. There are similarities between the two groups, the most obvious being the forced nature of their flight and then their need for material assistance and permission to live somewhere else.

So should these environmental migrants be officially classified as refugees eligible to receive the same standard of international protection?

It is a debate taking place within the increasingly complex world of global migration in which millions of people are on the move daily because of a variety of military, political, social, economic and environmental factors.

UNHCR was created more than a half century ago to act on behalf of one specific group of uprooted people—refugees. They are legally defined as persons forced to flee across an international border because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.

Critics argue that times have changed in the last few decades. Many millions of environmental migrants, an estimated 20-25 million persons internally displaced within their own countries, so-called IDPs, and others, they say, should also be classified as refugees and receive the kind of legal and material assistance from the international community they would otherwise be denied.

Newspapers, officials and the general

public already routinely refer to many disparate groups with the all-embracing term ‘refugees’ further blurring the issue.

The discussion was continued recently in the pages of the journal *The Ecologist*.

### **EXPANDED DEFINITION**

Andrew Simms, policy director of London’s New Economics Foundation argued that the term ‘persecution’ should be applied not only to persons suffering political or other officially defined harassment, but also to those “forced to live in worsening poverty on land that without warning could flood, or turn to dust.”

While widespread global climate change was being caused principally by the ‘economic and political decisions’ of powerful nations—policies pursued in full knowledge of their damaging consequences, he said,

THE GREAT MAJORITY OF REFUGEES LIVE ON THE VERY EDGE OF SURVIVABILITY. THEY ESCAPE FROM THE WORLD'S POOREST NATIONS AND TAKE SANCTUARY IN EQUALLY DESTITUTE COUNTRIES.

weave discarded plastic bags into mats and shelter materials.

**CHEQUERED HISTORY**

The energy efficient stove in all of its guises has had perhaps the most chequered career of any project. People in developing nations use inordinate amounts of wood for cooking but their traditional methods—often a simple open fire—are extremely inefficient. When tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of refugees cluster together in a confined space the results are predictable—a savage assault on the surrounding countryside as they scour for wood.

Better stoves appear to be the answer. In some African camps, families are encouraged first to plant several trees and are then 'rewarded' with a new stove (the ra-

tionale here being that nothing should ever be given away free). Today's stoves are simple and cheap devices made from local soils and clays, sometimes with tin liners which experts believe are as much as 60 percent more fuel-efficient than traditional methods. Their use should result in enormous savings among large concentrations of refugees.

So far so good for the theory, but it has proved frustratingly difficult to sustain such programs.

Rwandan refugees in Tanzania in the 1990s received new 'improved' cookers, but many abandoned them because they had been built 'in the wrong place' in their huts, traditional stone fires could burn large pieces of wood, thus avoiding the laborious job of chopping timber into smaller pieces for the new stoves which also took

longer to cook maize, thus negating their apparent fuel saving.

"We have learned many lessons," Matthew Owen, an environmental consultant, told REFUGEES at the time. "We do not put so much faith in the improved stove now."

Still the experts keep trying. One Swiss engineer designed a very effective grass-burning stove, but when it was field tested in Tanzania, it was quickly discovered that refugees would have had to plunder virtually all the grass in the area to feed the voracious machines. Some solar cookers are cheap and easy to build, but they take several times as long to cook a meal and many refugees view them skeptically.

There have been other setbacks. Newly arrived civilians at one site in Sudan were

*Turn to page 20*



One victim of the deteriorating environment.

it was poor countries which were left to "clear up a problem that they had almost nothing to do with creating."

"Is it right that while some states are far more responsible for creating problems like climate change, all states should bear equal responsibility for dealing with its displaced people?" Simms asked.

While there were so many international agreements covering the rights of capital and goods to move freely across national borders, the advocate argued "No comparable effort is ongoing to protect the rights of people who have to move across borders, whatever the need driving them." In urging that UNHCR take responsibility for

these people he said, "You cannot sacrifice green refugee Peter to save conventional refugee Paul."

While agreeing that the refugee agency was already involved in a limited way in environmental issues and helping internally displaced persons, UNHCR said there were fundamental differences between the two groups. Refugees could not turn to their own governments for protection because states were often the source of persecution and they therefore needed international assistance, it said, whereas environmental migrants continued to enjoy national protection whatever the state of the landscape.

"Lumping both groups together under the same heading would further cloud the issues and could undermine efforts to help and protect either group and to address the root causes of either type of displacement," UNHCR said.

The two sides agreed on one thing: many millions of migrants did need some kind of assistance. But the question remained: what organization should help and how? ■



# SATELLITE *images*, BU

*Projects range from the sophisticated—the use of satellite imagery to track the degradation of forests—to the most simple—employing burlap bags and discarded tin cans to grow vegetables in small corners of a crowded refugee camp. They can cost a few cents or millions of dollars. They may be designed to help a single family to stave off malnutrition or regenerate an entire region, helping not only large populations of refugees but also nearby local ‘host’ communities. Environmental programs include:*

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## T R E E S

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Millions of refugees need huge amounts of wood for cooking, heating and shelter and large concentrations of civilians can put a massive strain on local forests. In northwest Tanzania during the 1990s, for instance, uprooted peoples consumed 1,200 tons of firewood each day. Reforestation, tree planting and natural regeneration have therefore become major cornerstones of the refugee agency’s environmental program. Projects range from schemes to reinvigorate entire regions by replanting woodland or allowing local flora to flourish to those encouraging individual refugee families to plant trees in their settlements and backyards.



# RLAP *bags*, TIN *cans*



UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS+SDN+2002

Preparing tree seedlings in Sudan.



E D U C A T I O N

Environmental education may be the single most important policy in sensitizing refugees, local communities, government officials and humanitarian workers to environmental problems and solutions. Information is disseminated in a variety of ways, through official workshops and meetings, the formation of joint refugee and local community groups, forming special classes in refugee schools and through open-air theatre in the camps such as Dadaab in eastern Kenya.

UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS-KEN•2002

UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS-KEN•2002

**Open-air theatre** educates refugees on the environment.

G A R D E N I N G

In comparison to the space-age wizardry, a simple project called multi-storey gardening involving burlap bags, old tin cans and waste water, can be extremely useful for families in overcrowded refugee camps where there is little space to grow vegetables to supplement their diet. Any deep tubular bag is filled with soil. A perforated funnel made from scrap tins and packed with stones is inserted down the middle of the bag. Waste water poured down the funnel is

cleaned by the stones before seeping into the soil, watering a variety of vegetables growing at several levels. Experts are also exploring the effectiveness of a system used by Rwandan refugees who pack their waste into nearby termite mounds where it is broken down into a crude fertilizer which can be used on crops.





Multi-storey gardening.

Ifo camp in Kenya captured from space.

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Energy saving stoves in Honduras.



UNHCR/A. RITCHIE/CS•HND•1985

## STOVES

Many refugee families cook their meals on wasteful open fires and one of the most effective ways to cut down on wood consumption is the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves. But this process has not always gone smoothly. Some early stoves proved too

expensive or needed regular repair. Refugees rejected them because their traditional open fires were easier to use or because of cultural taboos. But experts continue to refine their models and insist many can save as much as 60-70 percent of a family's energy needs.

## SATELLITES

High tech imagery and information from satellites and global positioning systems play an important role in environmental strategy. Space photos pinpoint the location and layout of camps and layered 3D images can

help establish the most effective locations for the installation of telecommunications equipment for liaison with the outside world. Color-coded images pinpoint changes to the local environment and are particularly helpful in developing projects to combat erosion. In before-and-after sequences, they may help resolve political sensitive issues such as how much damage—or how little—refugees may be responsible for.





**A heck of a mess** to clean up.

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## C L E A N U P

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As hundreds of thousands of refugees return home in the Horn of Africa or to Afghanistan many camps need extensive cleanup. Costs can be enormous. In Africa alone, it could cost \$150 million annually to rehabilitate existing sites. In the past such work was often decided on an ad hoc basis with some areas rehabilitated, others

simply abandoned and great uncertainty over who exactly was responsible. Governments and humanitarian agencies, however, have become more sensitive to the issue in recent years. Particularly popular are small-scale, low-budget projects in which local organizations cleanup the landscape.

## C O N T O U R S

Centuries-old methods often prove to be the most efficient in preserving the environment. In the overpopulated, over-worked mountains of Rwanda, terracing prevents soil erosion and expands the amount of land available for crop cultivation. In building new camp sites the construction of roads which follow the contour of the landscape cause far less damage than those built directly up and down hillsides. Income generating projects

such as contour trenching and watershed management are encouraged among refugees.



Terracing in Rwanda halts soil erosion.

UNHCR/D. STONE/CS•RWA

## R E T U R N

The great majority of refugees flee the world's poorest regions, environmental degradation at home sometimes being the direct reason for their enforced departure. Their period in exile may be spent in equally difficult physical circumstances. Environmental experts say they have only just begun to 'scratch the surface' in preparing these people to return to what could once again be very demanding physical conditions.



Helping returnees to Laos with a small fruit garden.

UNHCR/L. TAYLOR/CS•LAO•1998

## I N T E G R A T I O N

Early refugees, especially in Africa, were often integrated into local communities, avoiding any major environmental impact. But as the number of uprooted people continued to rise during the last part of the 20th century and their length of stay in exile increased, sometimes lasting decades, governments tempered their welcome. Sprawling refugee camps became the norm. Only a few countries today integrate their 'visitors.' Zambia recently announced a new integration initiative for some of the nearly 300,000 refugees in that country who will



Only a few countries such as Uganda encourage local refugee integration and give them farming land.

UNHCR/E. EYSTER/CS•UGA•1998

join local communities and be given land to grow crops both for domestic use and export.







**Before and after:** The effects of a large exodus on the environment.

IT IS A PARTICULARLY CRITICAL TIME IN THE REFUGEE-ENVIRONMENTAL CYCLE WITH MANY CAMPS CLOSING IN THE HORN OF AFRICA AND ACROSS THE GLOBE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF AFGHANS RETURNING HOME.

► **LIVING** *on the* **EDGE**

given more than 100 tractors, but to use them efficiently they first had to uproot the surrounding tree cover. Being pastoralists, the refugees eventually abandoned the machines anyway after damaging the environment.

Part of this, of course, goes with the territory. Projects may be experimental in nature and some inevitably fail. Others collapse because of bureaucratic bungling; the lack of an institutional memory in organizations or their refusal to become involved in expensive, long-term projects which they consider development rather than humanitarian projects. Refugees, too, are often reluctant to embrace new ideas.

In Kenya's Kakuma camp some were not interested in using new stoves because they did not expect to stay for very long. Others shunned the stoves because they reminded them of the shape of graves. In Sudan they are sometimes used as flowerpots.

Cultural differences hamper other developments. Some women in Kakuma avoided using more modern toilets because

they feared they would become infertile. In Sudan, some projects were stalled almost indefinitely among Eritrean refugees because it was not realized that women were not allowed to work outside their homes. That situation has radically altered these days to such an extent that it led to a memorable exchange between one visiting dignitary and a male refugee.

"I see women, women working everywhere. But what are the men doing?" the visitor asked. To which the refugee replied: "The men give the permission for the women to work."

**WHAT NOW?**

The environmental stakes are enormous—on both the personal and global level. A carefully organized garden on a tiny backplot can sustain a starving family. A replanted forest may regenerate an entire region, supporting refugees and local communities alike.

Nations, often among the world's poorest, which have helped millions of refugees for many years in the past, can be encouraged to keep their doors open to future ar-

rivals if they can be convinced their countryside will not be despoiled. Political and physical barriers will be erected if they believe otherwise, as is already happening in some countries.

Financial and physical resources will never be enough to tackle every outstanding problem, but new technology and ideas, the greater involvement of more players, especially local communities, children and refugees themselves, and a more thorough and sustained application of existing knowledge and guidelines could have a major impact.

World Environment Day 2002 was used as a catalyst not only to launch thousands of projects and exhibits around the world, but also to encourage closer working ties between the refugee agency and its international and local partners.

Though a large body of information covering the majority of refugee-environmental situations already exists—including their initial flight, arrival in a safe country and ultimate repatriation—it is often applied sparingly, if at all.

During the chaos of a refugee exodus



UNHCR/S. BONESS/CS+RF+2001



Even when they return home, civilians face a harsh future.

environmental concerns generally take a backseat to more ‘immediate’ problems such as providing food, housing and water and political calculation. In some circumstances this is inevitable.

A camp may not be located in the best environmental position because governments are often preoccupied with security concerns.

Harassed aid officials have little time for ‘esoteric’ considerations such as the preservation of trees in the race to provide life-saving water supplies.

But the two issues need not be mutually exclusive and misguided emergency decisions often return to haunt aid operations leading to a degraded life style for refugees, clashes with local communities over scarce natural resources, fractured relations with governments and expensive cleanup operations.

Even common-sense guidelines are still ignored. Forests continue to be chopped down and other areas bulldozed clean to establish camp sites causing irreparable damage, according to environmental experts.

There is no clearly defined exit strategy either among humanitarian agencies. Sites which once housed huge concentrations of civilians have been cleaned up—or not—on an ad hoc basis and one expert described the humanitarian modus operandi of earlier years as: “Get out of the country as soon as the last refugee has left.”

#### NOT ACCEPTABLE

In today’s environmentally aware world, that is no longer acceptable especially if hosting countries are expected to continue to shoulder the burden of hosting future refugees.

There are other areas where much remains to be done. Refugees often return home to areas which are as fragile as the camps themselves and David Stone, UNHCR’s senior environmental expert said, “We have only just begun to scratch the surface” in helping prepare civilians to meet this challenge.

No preparation or the wrong kind of preparation is a recipe for disaster. It was discovered recently, for example, that an area in Eritrea officially earmarked for the return of many of the expected 120,000 returnees would not be able to sustain them. A search was launched for new locations.

Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries on earth and in its dilemma where to house floods of returning refugees the government de-gazetted the majority of the country’s 2,500 square kilometer Akagera National Park to help accommodate them. To the horror of environmentalists, it has been virtually destroyed in the intervening years.

The plight of urban refugees has had little attention to date and the problems faced by the world’s estimated 20-25 million people internally displaced within

their own countries are often more politically sensitive than those of refugees. “It is easier for humanitarian agencies to give these people a quick fix such as shelter and food than even begin to think of tackling long-term problems with nature,” one expert said. “That’s one for the development boys, but much of the time there is simply a vacuum.”

Some tentative steps have now been taken, according to UNHCR’s Stone, to develop blueprints for a pilot ‘environmentally friendly’ refugee camp which would balance site layout, water supplies, arable farming plots and technology in a careful mix. Such a plan could then be applied in situations around the world. “It may sound idealistic, but it is practical,” Stone said. “Most everything could be recycled or regenerated within a given camp.”

Wider cooperation with local communities, governments and international development agencies and a more flexible and inclusive attitude within humanitarian organizations must also be realized, environmental experts insisted. Some of these efforts, it must be noted, have been underway for years with only limited success.

But as High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said recently: “We cannot ignore the environmental consequences of refugees and refugee operations. This could jeopardize the basic rights and needs of refugees... the (very) institution of asylum.” ■





*Afghanistan has seen it all before, but hundreds of thousands of people are again heading home*

# *Rush*



| AFGHANISTAN |



# Hour

The chaos of return.



Rush Hour

by Fernando del Mundo

**A**bdul Khaliq has never known anything but war, pain and exile. As a youngster he watched invading Soviet soldiers destroy his family's vineyard, pomegranate, apple and apricot orchards.

Laboriously, plant by plant, the family rebuilt their farm, the Soviets withdrew but Afghanistan's new rulers, the Taliban wreaked vengeance on the land once more, torching houses, dynamiting centuries-old irrigation systems and felling the trees yet again.

Abdul Khaliq was not spared his own personal hell. He lost his left leg when he stepped on a land mine in the capital, Kabul, 12 years ago before fleeing into a life of exile in neighboring Pakistan.

Undeterred, earlier this year he packed his wife and five children into a rented car and headed back to his village of Qali Bibi in Afghanistan's Shomali plain.

"The Russians destroyed Shomali in the 1980s," the 32-year-old recalled. "We revived it. Then the Taliban came and razed it. We will make it productive again. We have nowhere else to go. This is home."

Abdul Khaliq is one of an overwhelming number of refugees once more voting with their feet and going home.

In the early 1990s an estimated two million Kurds returned to their devastated homeland following the Gulf War and its chaotic aftermath within a matter of months.

Nearly a decade later 800,000 people fled or were forcibly thrown out of their towns and villages in the Serb province of Kosovo, but within three months most had returned. Perhaps never before had so many people left and then gone home in such a short time.

The pattern was repeated in Afghanistan this year. Following the installation of an Interim Administration in Kabul more than one million Afghans from abroad and at least 160,000 civilians internally displaced within the country—a total of more than one million people—also went back within a similar three month period.



"In Afghanistan, like in the two earlier operations, all of the political and historical indicators available suggested this would not happen so quickly," Ekber Memencioglu, UNHCR's senior director for the region said. "In fact, we didn't think the conditions were right, but the people did."

**A BIZARRE PROBLEM**

Their enthusiasm to go home highlighted a bizarre problem: the return of so many refugees was happening too quickly, almost too well, threatening to engulf the country's extremely fragile recovery.

After all, this was one of the world's poorest nations, which had endured

decades of war, including a Soviet invasion. At its peak in 1990, the exodus of refugees reached more than six million people, making it the world's single largest humanitarian crisis. The country's schools, hospitals, roads and farms lay in ruins. As a new millennium dawned even the weather became a deadly enemy when Afghanistan suffered the worst drought in living memory affecting at least 12 million people.

Well aware of the tenuous internal situation, the new government in Kabul had hoped to stage a cautious and carefully structured return by nearly four million refugees—still the largest single group of uprooted people in the world though their overall numbers had fallen in the last few years.

In line with this policy, the U.N. refugee agency estimated it would assist less than one million people returning from abroad throughout the whole of 2002. But that figure was surpassed by spring, forcing UNHCR to double its planning estimate and High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers to admit somewhat ruefully, "It is a bit scary that the operation is going so well and we have to live from day to day."

Ironically, until the Septem-



UNHCR/P. BENATAR/CS+PAK/002

Registering in Pakistan for an 'assisted' return.

THEIR ENTHUSIASM TO GO HOME HIGHLIGHTED A SEEMINGLY BIZARRE PROBLEM: THE RETURN OF SO MANY REFUGEES WAS HAPPENING TOO QUICKLY, ALMOST TOO WELL, THREATENING THE COUNTRY'S FRAGILE RECOVERY.

ber 11 terror attacks in the United States, Afghanistan had been a largely forgotten problem. UNHCR's budget was a modest \$8.4 million for the year 2001 and even that was 40 percent under funded when the suicide bombers struck.

With world attention suddenly focused on the country, the agency estimated it would need nearly \$300 million in emergency funding to tackle the unfolding drama as its field staff more than trebled to around 700 personnel in nearly 30 newly opened offices.

**DOING BETTER?**

The international community, fully aware that it had 'abandoned' Afghanistan once before following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, vowed that this time it would do better and would never again 'walk away' from the country.

The lack of funding, however, quickly became one major bottleneck among many in trying to put Afghanistan back together again. As stifling summer heat and drought again enveloped the country, UNHCR faced the possibility of cutting travel grants, housing and water projects because it had received only 65 percent of its financial needs.

Other agencies fared even worse. At the time this article went to press the World Food Program had slashed its assistance to returnee families by two-thirds to 50 kilograms each and warned of a potential total rupture in its food pipeline later in the year. The International Organization for Migration suspended its entire program providing transportation for returning refugees.

The World Health Organization and Habitat received zero emergency funding. Little of the nearly \$5 billion promised for economic development in the next five years arrived. An ambitious program to reopen thousands of schools was moribund.

"A relief worker came here one day and distributed two pencils and a notebook to each of the students," said 31-year-old Sadiqa Naroozyan who returned from exile in Iran to run a women's center for or-

phans and widows in Kabul. "There were a dozen photographers who also came and took pictures. We have not heard from them again. Many countries offered to help Afghanistan. There were many promises, but no action."

A senior humanitarian official said simply, "It's an utter disgrace."

**LESS SECURITY**

A report commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development translated what these problems and a worsening drought meant for the country's 27

work of contrasts—of renovation and massive destruction, of relative security and widespread banditry.

Kabul became a frenetic hive of activity full of rebuilding, cell phones, business suits, international meetings, spiralling rents, blaring all-night music which was once banned by the recent Taliban rulers, returning refugees and the comforting presence of international soldiers on the streets.

The country's few roads were congested with endless columns of vehicles crawling along like giant ants, but gunmen also rode



Classes to warn about the millions of unexploded mines still in Afghanistan.

million people, including the returnees. The level of 'diet security'—official parlance for having enough food to eat on a regular basis—plummeted from 59 percent two years ago to an alarming nine percent by mid-2002. A similar measure for water fell from 43 to 15 percent.

The country was a bewildering patch-

work of contrasts—of renovation and massive destruction, of relative security and widespread banditry.

Intimidation ranged from individual acts of violence, including murder, to fears by some ethnic groups that the country's various strongmen would continue an ages-old custom of seeking vengeance against old enemies.





UNHCR/P. BENATAR/CS.AFG.2002

AFGHANISTAN HAS SEEN IT ALL BEFORE, A SEEMINGLY UNENDING MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE SWISHING BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE REGION IN AN ONGOING TRAGIC GAME OF MUSICAL CHAIRS.

*Rush Hour*

Though freed from the suffocating strictures of the Taliban regime when they were under almost permanent 'house arrest', women nevertheless reacted cautiously to their new found freedom. Some returned to work but many continued to wear the all-enveloping burqa which had become a global symbol of oppression. "We don't want to try a new lifestyle just yet, to become recognized," one westernized woman said. "Maybe there will be more changes, this time backwards. It is good not to move too quickly."

An estimated 40,000 people tried to go

the other way and cross into Pakistan to seek refuge, but became trapped in a squalid strip of no man's land on the border when authorities in that country refused them permission to enter.

High Commissioner Lubbers said on one recent visit, "This is a country with a tradition of settling disputes very easily with a gun. This has to be reduced step by step, but I think we are on the way."

UNHCR's countrywide network and the presence of humanitarian officials offered a degree of stability and protection in this volatile mix. And quiet diplomacy helped defuse potentially dangerous security situations.

Complementing the agency's core protection activities, it was also providing shel-

ter for 96,000 families, seeds and tools for an additional 144,000 households and mini-projects to repair schools, clinics and water facilities.

**DIFFERENT SIGNALS**

The speed of the returns threatened to swamp such assistance and some harried officials privately suggested the repatriation be slowed or even halted to 'buy time' for national recovery. Paradoxically, however, some capitals saw it as an opportune time to 'return' thousands of Afghans who had sought political asylum in their countries. Erika Feller, UNHCR's senior protection official told capitals that "to bring people back precipitously can only contribute to the growing destabilization of a



Returning home and rebuilding.

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SAID IT WOULD NEVER WALK AWAY AGAIN. BUT THE LACK OF FUNDING BECAME ONE MAJOR BOTTLENECK AMONG MANY IN TRYING TO PUT AFGHANISTAN BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

very fragile country.”

Her warning only underlined the recent history of Afghanistan which has seen it all before.

In a seemingly unending movement of people swishing back and forth across the region in massive waves, nearly five million Afghans who fled the original Soviet invasion had gone home, even before the latest returns got underway. But as ongoing violence gripped the country, equal numbers of people left in an ongoing tragic game of musical chairs.

The drama will not end anytime soon. Even if the current rush continues—a big “if” given the extreme difficulties in Afghanistan—it might still take several years for the great bulk of people to go

back. Some never will. Untold numbers of young refugees were born outside a country they have never seen. Others married and integrated into communities in other countries.

The mood among refugees and returnees veers dramatically from euphoria to deep disappointment, anger even. Ainud-din Sherzai returned home from Iran but now shares one room in a house with an extended family of 20 in Kabul. “If I don’t find a job soon, I will probably end up there,” he said pointing to a nearby graveyard. “Or I will go back to Iran.”

In that country, 50-year-old Mahbooba Niazi who has been a refugee for 19 years explains why she will not be going home anytime soon. “I don’t have an education, I

can’t even read,” she said. “But my three children are in university and I am not returning home yet.”

When Abdul Khaliq, the farmer who lost his leg 12 years ago returned to his home on the Shomali plain, he immediately repaired one room in the ruins of his father’s house, spring being an ideal time to construct mud walls. Villagers busily repaired a 150-year-old underground water system of canals and channels which provides drinking water and irrigates farms.

“We need tools, we need seeds, we need help from God to make it what it was before,” a neighbor Jan Mohammad said. “But when we are done, Shomali will bloom again.” “This is our place, it is our home,” Abdul Khaliq said for emphasis. ■



■ **UNITED NATIONS:** The International Criminal Court, created to try individuals accused of genocide and war crimes, has become a reality.

■ **CAIRO:** High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers has urged Arab governments and people to become more involved in refugee issues.

## Seeking asylum

### ERITREA

#### No longer refugees

Hundreds of thousands of Eritreans fled a 30-year war of independence and recent border conflict with neighboring Ethiopia. Many have since returned home, but UNHCR said that on December 31, those still living abroad will no longer be considered as refugees. The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention both stipulate the conditions in which civilians qualify for refugee status, but also state that when conditions return to normal in their own countries and refugees no longer face the threat of persecution, this protection will be removed. Individuals who believe they would be in danger if they returned home will retain the right to seek continued asylum.

### EAST TIMOR

#### A nation at last

After an independence struggle soaked in blood and the establishment of a U.N. transitional government, East Timor became an independent nation in May. The process has been so successful that, as in the case of Eritrean refugees (above) UNHCR said that on December 31, it will end refugee status for those among 260,000 East Timorese who fled during a wave of violence in 1999 and remain abroad. "Over the last years we've returned more than 207,000 people without incident," High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said. "Refugees are increasingly choosing to return home, and their countrymen are welcoming them back with open arms."

### EUROPE

## European turbulence

**“W**e are not advocating a ‘Fortress Europe’”, British Prime Minister Tony Blair insisted. The Guardian newspaper had another interpretation, headlining one report: “Fortress Europe pulls up the drawbridge.” Prime Minister Blair did acknowledge that the issue of immigration and asylum seekers was “one of the most pressing issues of our time” and the increasingly

anti-immigrant candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, stunned Europe when he strongly challenged for the French presidency, apparently underlining a continent-wide shift to the hard right. Denmark, Italy and Britain unveiled tough new immigration and asylum measures. Before the EU Council summit in Seville, Spain, on 21-22 June, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers declared that European Union



Asylum seekers attempting to enter Britain via the Channel tunnel.

heated debate across Europe threatened at times to swamp all other news. Early in the year UNHCR generally welcomed one European Union directive to ensure that most asylum seekers would receive a uniform package of benefits throughout member states. The directive would regulate access to health care and education, the provision of identity documents, information on asylum procedures and introduce special measures to protect vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children.

European voters were venting their frustration over what they perceived to be weak and ineffective government policies. A long-time

leaders had every reason to place illegal immigration atop their agenda, stressing the need to develop common asylum and immigration policies. "Many of those reaching Europe's borders are refugees in need of protection. But many more are not, travelling mainly for economic reasons," Lubbers said. "Strict and workable policies are needed to sort the migrants from the refugees. The fundamental credibility of the asylum system depends on it." In addition to domestic measures, Lubbers said EU governments should also focus on helping the uprooted and the dispossessed in their countries and regions of origin. ■

■ **UNITED NATIONS:** Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended a 4,000-strong U.N. peace-keeping mission in Democratic Congo be extended for one year.

■ **WASHINGTON:** The U.S., pre-occupied by September 11, resettled 68,426 refugees in fiscal 2001, the lowest number since 1987.

■ **BOGOTA:** More than two million people have been displaced during 40 years of civil war in Colombia.

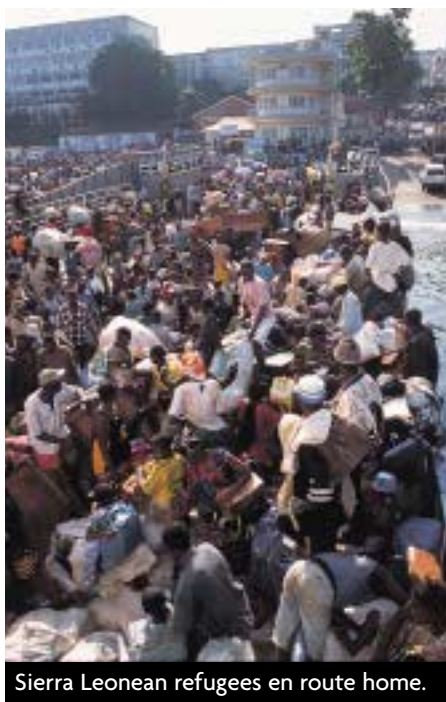
■ **CANBERRA:** Australia plans to exclude some off-shore islands from its migration regime, meaning persons landing there will not be allowed to apply for asylum.

## AFRICA

# Breakthrough... and more war

In Africa there were 4.2 million people 'of concern' to UNHCR at the start of 2002, but by the middle of the year there had been significant progress in trying to resolve two of the continent's most bloody and protracted civil wars.

After a decade of conflict in which hundreds of thousands of persons fled and some 50,000 were killed, the shooting stopped in Sierra Leone and peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections were held under the watchful eyes of 17,400 U.N. troops forming the largest peacekeeping mission in the world. As the fighting gradually subsided 162,000 refugees returned home, but there was an equal number still living in surrounding countries. Following the death of rebel leader Jonas Savimbi, a cease-fire agreement was also signed in Angola where at least four million people were dis-



Sierra Leonean refugees en route home.

2004, if there is no renewed fighting. Desultory talks continued on the future of the Democratic Republic of Congo and since the installation of a transitional government in Burundi, there was an increase in the number of 'spontaneous' returns of civilians from camps in western Tanzania. But there were also renewed problems. Fresh fighting in Liberia threatened not only the stability of that state, but also of surrounding countries. There

placed within the country and nearly a half million sought refuge in surrounding states. Their repatriation may begin next year and elections held in

was strife in Congo Republic, Democratic Congo and in the Horn of Africa, leading to renewed flights of refugees in those regions. ■

## UNITED NATIONS

# A message to the world

She was barely taller than the lectern on which she was speaking, but 13-year-old Gabriela Azurdy Arrieta from Bolivia scolded some 60 national leaders and 3,000 other delegates: "We are street children. We are the children of war. We are the victims of AIDS." Gabriela addressed a U.N. General Assembly Special Session on Children held this spring to review developments since an earlier 1990 summit and set priorities for the next decade. UNHCR cares for an estimated 10 million youngsters (REFUGEES magazine N° 122) and High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers received a petition to world leaders signed by 43,000 children asking for the right to go

home. "My message... to the world is that children should not be made refugees, homeless and stateless," 17-year-old Bhutanese refugee Ganga Adhikari said as she presented the petition. The refugee agency underlined its priorities including reuniting separated children and their families, preventing sexual violence, ending forced military recruitment, registering all children and increasing their access to formal education. "Children are our mirror to the future," Lubbers said. "However, if all they know is deprivation, violence and exploitation, it is unlikely they will contribute to the development of stable, just and productive societies."

# Seeking asylum

## BRAZIL

### Latin American welcome

Brazil has become the second country in Latin America after Chile to officially welcome refugees for permanent resettlement. A small number of Afghans arrived in Porto Alegre and by the end of the year Brazil will be hosting around 100 people under an agreement signed in 1999 with the U.N. refugee agency. Most refugees and asylum seekers arrive unexpectedly in a foreign country seeking safety, but 17 nations worldwide now participate in official 'resettlement programs'.

## MEXICO

### Land titles

Fewer and fewer countries now allow refugees to integrate into local communities. Mexico, which helped thousands of people from Guatemala starting in the 1980s, has been an exception. An estimated 43,000 Guatemalans eventually returned home, but Mexico granted citizenship to others and in one recent ceremony continuing to stress the importance of local integration, President Vicente Fox Quesada ceremoniously handed out nearly 3,000 land titles to both former refugees and local residents.

## KOSOVO

### Continuing threats

No significant returns of minority groups to Kosovo have taken place in the last year, according to a new position paper released by UNHCR. It underlined the need for members of these groups to continue to receive international protection in countries of asylum and any returns should be on a purely voluntary basis. Those minorities already in the province, scene of a major conflict in 1999 involving national and international forces, continue to face security problems.



# The 2002 Nansen Award

The captain, crew and owner of the Norwegian container ship Tampa which rescued hundreds of shipwrecked asylum seekers in the Indian Ocean last August have been awarded the 2002

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers at a ceremony in Oslo in late June. Captain Rinnan and his crew altered the course of their huge container ship to rescue 438 boat people and the subsequent refusal of



Pavarotti and friends.

## Pavarotti's Angolan children

Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti dedicated his annual charity concert in Modena, Italy, this year to Angolan refugee children. The concert will raise funds for the youngsters and, according to Pavarotti, remind the world of the plight of victims of one of Africa's longest and most forgotten civil wars. Around five million people have been forced to flee by the conflict and untold numbers have died. At the same concert, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers announced that Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani had been appointed a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador. Armani will visit refugee camps in the near future and said he accepted his new role "with humility, recognizing the challenges for the world's refugees are significant." ■



The 2002 Nansen Refugee Award ceremony.

Nansen Refugee Award, given annually to individuals or organizations that have distinguished themselves on behalf of refugees. Captain Arne F. Rinnan and his colleagues received medals and certificates from Queen Sonja of Norway and

Australia to allow them to land in that country touched off an international furor. The award committee announced the prize to honor the company's international commitment to the principle of rescue at sea. ■

## The world's oldest refugee?

He may be the world's oldest refugee and has a remarkable tale of life and survival to tell. Silver Kawanda says he was born in the interior of Angola in the late 19th century and today is 105 years old. He has seen the rise and fall of colonial empires and the emergence of modern day Africa. He escaped at least some of the earlier wars which constantly ravaged his country, but in January, 2000, when he was already more than 100 years old, Silver was eventually forced to flee as clashes between government

forces and UNITA rebels engulfed the region. "I spent four months covering more than 150 kilometers" from his town to the Nangweshi refugee camp in neighboring Zambia, Silver Kawanda told visiting High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers recently. Together with his 80-year-old wife, Paulina Chivela, "we survived on wild fruits and roots and at times we went without food. We followed birds which led us to fruit which we ate. When one found a dead animal, that was a special meal. We were lucky sometimes when

tree leaves spread on the ground became our mattresses." He was unable to walk long distances and other fleeing civilians carried him to safety on improvised stretchers made of poles and tree fibers. Many times they had to cross rivers full of crocodiles. After talking with Silver and also visiting some of the young mothers in the camp, Lubbers said, "It was a remarkable experience—seeing a man who is more than a century old and who represents such a rich history and seeing babies who represent the future."

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**“I used to vote with my hands. I did it today with my toe.”**

*A voter in Sierra Leone’s recent elections who had been mutilated by rebels during the country’s civil war.*

**“The relationship between refugees and the environment has long been overlooked.”**

*UNHCR High Commissioner Sadako Ogata in 1992 in perhaps the most comprehensive statement until that time on the links between refugees and the environment.*



**“We need to tackle what is one of the most pressing issues of our time, which is the issue of immigration and asylum.”**

*British Prime Minister Tony Blair.*



**“We thought they were here**

**to cut our trees down and use our water.”**

*A Zambian elder about the arrival of Angolan refugees. Zambia has announced a new initiative to integrate refugees into local communities.*



**“We cannot ignore the environmental consequences of refugee crises because this could jeopardize the basic rights and needs of refugees... the institution of asylum.”**

*UNHCR High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers.*



**“We are not advocating a ‘Fortress Europe’. But there**

**has to be some order and some rules brought into the system whereby people come into Europe.”**

*British Prime Minister Tony Blair on proposed new measures to crack down on illegal immigration.*



**“At discussions on global finance and the economy, the environment is still treated as an unwelcome guest.”**

*U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan launching a new campaign to raise awareness for this August’s World Summit on Sustainable Development.*



**“What does the refugee minister call a refugee on**

**the moon? ‘An astronaut.’ What does the refugee minister call 100,000 refugees on the moon? A hell of a good idea.”**

*Danish parliamentarian Kamal Qureshi attacking tougher government measures towards immigrants.*



**“We tend to look at the environment through a very narrowly focused telescope. It involves politics, protection, security, food and health.”**

*UNHCR field protection officer Sergio Calle-Noreña.*



**“The prospect of returning to the type of war Angola has witnessed in the last decade is almost zero.”**

*Ibrahim Gambari, U.N. special advisor for Africa on the future of the west African state of Angola.*



**“You don’t change the devastation of 1999 into a Garden of Eden overnight. But we have laid solid bases for the country to live in peace.”**

*Sergio Vieira de Mello, U.N. administrator for East Timor shortly before the territory became independent on May 20.*



**“We came back because we heard there was peace and security. But there is no work and no place we can afford to live. We have freedom now, but we cannot eat that.”**

*Malik Rahman and his 14-member family returning to Afghanistan after an absence of 20 years.*