

Great Lakes

Recent Developments

The Cease-fire Agreement signed in Lusaka on 10 July 1999 by the six countries involved in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), raised new hopes for relative stability the Great Lakes region of Africa. Violations of the cease-fire agreement, however, were frequent in 2000 and fighting has continued unabated, displacing large numbers of people within the country as well as across borders. Fighting was particularly heavy in Equateur Province, prompting some 100,000 people to seek refuge in the Republic of the Congo and 10,000 in the Central African Republic (CAR). Fighting in the rest of the country forced thousands of others to flee to Zambia.

In Burundi, hopes for peace soared after the lifting of the economic embargo and the signature of the Arusha Peace Agreement in August 2000. As a result of the improving security situation at the beginning of the year, the UN partially lifted country-wide security restrictions in April. The partial lifting of these restrictions allowed humanitarian agencies renewed access to the north and north-east of the country, where the situation was relatively stable. Despite these positive developments and the political breakthrough in Arusha, hostilities have not ended. On the contrary, violence has escalated in many parts of the country, forcing thousands to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, mainly the United Republic of Tanzania.

In the Republic of the Congo, the peace agreement and the cease-fire accord signed at the end of 1999 ended the third civil war in the last six years, but serious

obstacles remain in the path of lasting peace and reconciliation. A full-fledged relief operation is being established to assist refugees from the DRC who are located along a 700-kilometre stretch of the river Ubangui, from Betou in the north to Njoundou and Liranga in the south.

To date, access to them has been extremely difficult, for security reasons. UNHCR

has nevertheless been able to provide

basic relief assistance to

the majority of the refugees

by using roads that run

alongside the river banks

and by using secondary

rivers parallel to the

Ubangui which, for the

time being, is not considered

a safe supply or transport

route. Further measures

are being pursued to create

acceptable security conditions

for UNHCR staff to operate

in. In particular, the

Government of the

Republic of the Congo will

be assisted and encouraged

to curb incursions by war-

ring parties from the DRC

which threaten the security

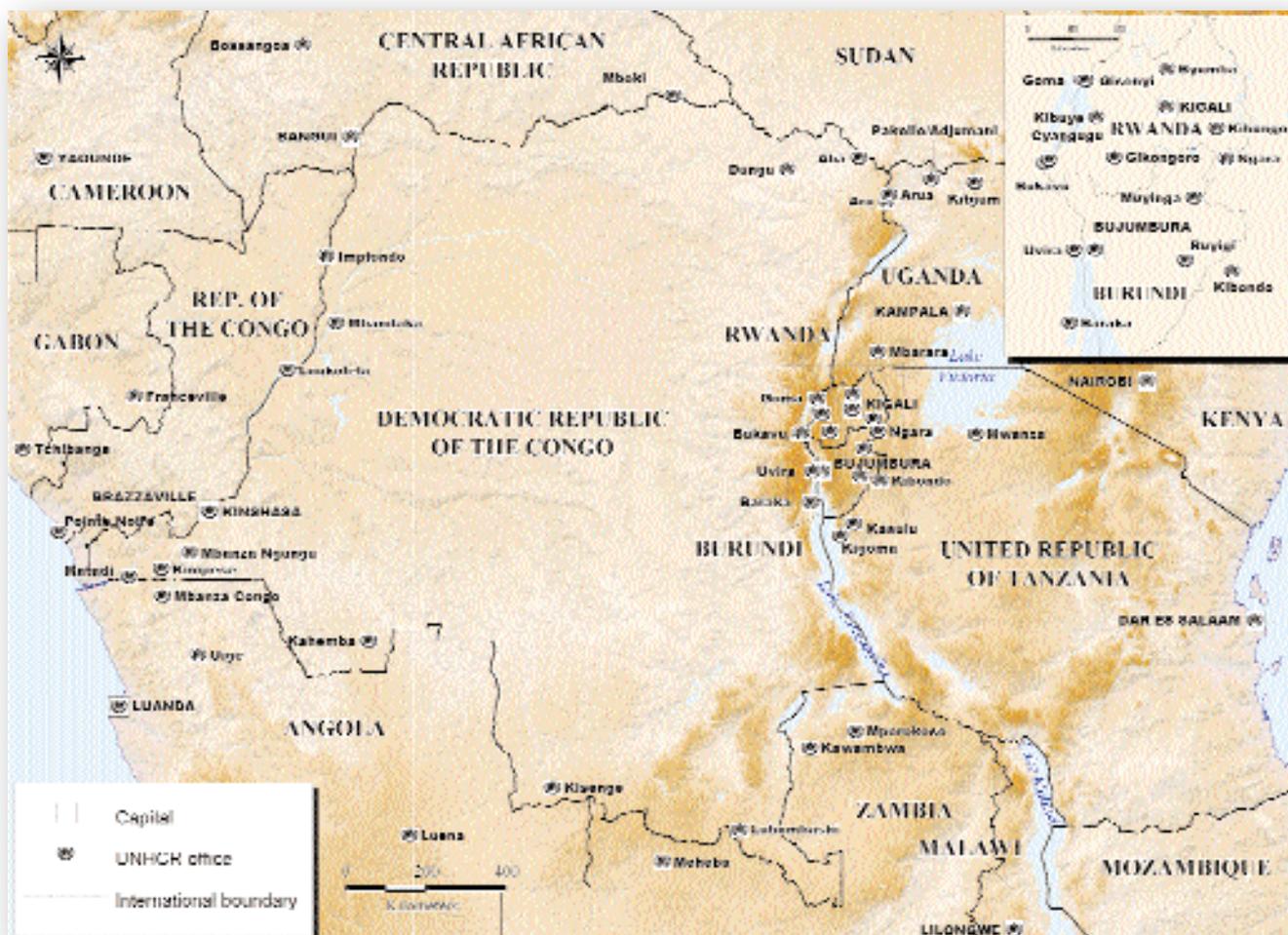
of local people, refugees

and humanitarian staff

alike.

Burundi
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Republic of the Congo
Rwanda
United Republic of Tanzania





In Rwanda, major changes in the Government led to a degree of political instability during the first six months of 2000. UNHCR continues to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Rwandan refugees from the neighbouring countries. An estimated 20,000 Rwandans will have returned by the end of 2000. Most of them are Hutus who fled in 1994 to the DRC. Many had been living in extremely isolated areas, in deplorable conditions, often intimidated by Interahamwe and other groups responsible for the 1994 genocide. The ongoing repatriation of Rwandan refugees from the DRC is expected to continue in 2001. This is likely to place even greater pressure on limited land, resources and infrastructure in Rwanda.

The United Republic of Tanzania continued to receive influxes of refugees throughout the year. The Burundi and Congolese refugees enjoy *prima facie* refugee status, while other refugees seeking asylum in the United Republic of Tanzania must undergo refugee status determination by the National Eligibility Committee. It is clear that the consolidation of peace and stability throughout the Great Lakes region will be dependent on the repatriation and successful reintegration of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The safety and security of humanitarian staff working in the field continues to be a source of concern. A number of practical measures have been taken to reinforce staff security. UNHCR will

continue to work closely with the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) to strengthen the safety of UN and partner NGO staff working in the Great Lakes region.

Strategic Objectives

In 2001, UNHCR's strategic objectives in the Great Lakes region are to promote respect for humanitarian principles and international refugee law in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, thus making a long-term contribution to national and regional peace and security. UNHCR will protect the rights of refugees and returnees through the application of relevant international instruments while maintaining an effective presence in the countries of origin and asylum. UNHCR will also ensure and co-ordinate the provision of assistance to refugees, returnees and other persons of concern. The Office will spearhead the search, in collaboration with all relevant parties, for lasting solutions for populations of concern and promote voluntary repatriation, subject to adequate security and formal agreements with the respective governments.

UNHCR will pursue efforts to address security issues arising from the presence of refugee camps in the western part of the United Republic of Tanzania. It will assist countries of origin to ensure the speedy reintegration of returnees and internally displaced populations, in co-operation with other organisations.



The Office will also assist countries of asylum to address problems created by hosting large numbers of refugees. At the same time, UNHCR will remain mindful of the possibility of new population outflows and internal displacements. It will therefore update regional contingency planning in collaboration with other agencies, rehearsing scenarios and co-ordinated responses particularly in Angola, Burundi and the DRC; and advocate increased international humanitarian support for the region.

Operations

In addition to the country programmes in **Burundi**, the **United Republic of Tanzania**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **Rwanda**, which are presented in separate chapters, UNHCR has operations in the Republic of the Congo, as described below.

The **Republic of the Congo** is in the midst of a fragile transition towards stability and national reconciliation. The peace agreement and the cease-fire accord signed at the end of 1999 ended the third civil war in the last six years, but enormous challenges remain: principally the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants. The improved security situation in the Republic of the Congo encouraged displaced persons to return to their areas of origin. In 2001, UNHCR will work with the Government to protect and assist Angolan, Congolese (DRC), Rwandan and other refugees in the Republic of the Congo and to reintegrate Congolese refugees returning from Gabon and the DRC. The needs of refugee women and children will continue to receive priority. Agricultural and income-generating activities will serve to increase refugees' self-sufficiency.

UNHCR will continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees and to promote the local integration of those unwilling to repatriate. Assistance to some 2,900 Rwandan refugees in Loukolela camp was phased out at the end of 2000. Following the Government's decision to sus-

pend the local settlement programme for the 1,500 Rwandan refugees in Kintele camp (many of whom have a military background), the camp will be dismantled. In collaboration with the Government, UNHCR is seeking alternative solutions for this group.

Angolan refugees from the enclave of Cabinda are still living in three sites in the vicinity of Pointe-Noire. As significant numbers settled down in local villages, this led to a progressive phase-out of assistance. In 2001, UNHCR will continue to facilitate the local settlement of Angolan refugees and continue to provide limited assistance to them, mainly in the health and education sectors, in the form of support to cover medical costs and the costs of attending local schools and vocational training courses. The aim is to help refugees become self-sufficient. UNHCR will continue to assist individual refugees who voluntarily repatriate to Angola.

Congolese (DRC) refugees have been arriving in the Republic of the Congo since July 1999 from villages in Equatorial Province across the river Ubangui, to escape fighting in the DRC. A full-fledged relief operation to assist them is being established with the reinforcement of the existing UNHCR Offices in Loukolela and Imfpondo and the opening of an additional office in Betou, some 100 kms from the border with the Central African Republic (CAR). A separate appeal to fund this programme will be launched, as soon as the refugees' needs have been fully assessed. Close co-operation will continue between UNHCR offices in the CAR and the Republic of the Congo as well as with other UN agencies to reinforce basic services in this region, where there are twice as many refugees as local people. Implementation of all future programmes will depend on access and security.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Burundi	10,311,424
Democratic Republic of the Congo	25,303,286
Republic of the Congo	3,664,160
United Republic of Tanzania	32,095,720
Regional Projects ¹	10,191,900
Sub-total Great Lakes Operation	81,566,490
Rwanda	10,341,012
Total	91,907,502

¹ Includes assistance to various refugees and returnees in the Republic of the Congo and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, voluntary repatriation assistance and scholarships for refugee students in the Great Lakes region.