

WESTERN SAHARA OPERATION

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Promote and facilitate voluntary repatriation to the Territory of all Western Saharan refugees found eligible to participate in the referendum (along with their family members), as prescribed by the UN Settlement Plan for Western Sahara (UN Settlement Plan), following the publication of the voters' lists and completion of other activities during the transitional period, including the release of prisoners of war, reduction and confinement of troops, promulgation of a general amnesty and demining of repatriation routes and reception centres. Pending repatriation, UNHCR continued to protect and assist Western Saharan refugees in the camps in Tindouf, Algeria.

Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Algeria (Refugees)	165,000*	80,000	-	-
Mauritania (Refugees)	26,420	-	-	-

* According to estimates by the Algerian Government.

Impact

- Delays in the implementation of the UN Settlement Plan prevented the repatriation of any Western Saharan refugees in 1999 and, consequently, the achievement of a long-term solution to their plight.
- Consequently, UNHCR continued to protect and care for 80,000 Western Saharan refugees in the camps in Tindouf, paying special attention to vulnerable individuals, women and children. All received the basics of subsistence —adequate food, water and sanitation— plus health services and primary education.
- The first and most substantial phase of the pre-registration of refugees was completed. Just over 107,000 people were registered in Tindouf, Algeria and about 26,000 in Mauritania. The Algerian Government estimates that the Western Saharan refugees on its territory number 165,000, all of whom are of concern to UNHCR.
- Preparatory activities for repatriation continued: road and air reconnaissance studies, the identification of potential water sources in the Territory and an assessment of resources required for rapid reintegration and sustainable return were carried out.
- As requested by the UN Security Council, UNHCR submitted a draft Plan of Action for Cross-border Confidence-building Measures to the Governments of Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, as well as to the *Frente Popular para la Liberación de la Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro* (the POLISARIO Front) authorities. The UNHCR Plan of Action and associated activities could not be completed due to the outstanding political issues.



Income and Expenditure (USD)

WORKING BUDGET*	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE***
4,432,922	1,421,897	4,201,985	5,623,882	3,217,004

* Includes costs at Headquarters.

** Includes opening balance and adjustments.

*** Expenditure related to Western Saharan refugees in Algeria is reported under General Programmes in the Regional Overview for North Africa.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

Thousands of Western Saharans fled the Territory in 1975. Most found refuge in western Algeria, where they were accommodated in four camps in the Tindouf area. The Algerian Government estimated the population of the camps to be 165,000. Other refugees went to Mauritania and other countries, where they settled among the local population.

In 1990, the parties agreed to a UN-sponsored Settlement Plan, which calls for a just and definitive solution to the question of Western Sahara by means of a cease-fire and a referendum to let the people of the Territory choose between independence or integration with Morocco. After acceptance by the two parties (Morocco and the POLISARIO Front) the plan was adopted in 1991 (Security Council Resolution 690). When the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) arrived in September 1991, following UN General Assembly authorisation, a cease-fire came into effect and preparations for the referendum got underway. In 1992, however, implementation was suspended when differences over the process of identifying eligible voters led to an impasse. Following a series of direct talks between the parties under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, James A. Baker III, in September 1997, the parties signed an agreement in Houston that opened the way for full implementation of the UN Settlement Plan.

The UN Settlement Plan requests UNHCR to promote and facilitate the voluntary repatriation to the Territory from Algeria, Mauritania and other countries of all Western Saharan refugees found eligible to participate in the referendum (and their family members). Due to persistent political disputes, primarily over voter identification procedures, the UN Settlement Plan was repeatedly delayed in 1999 and several of its main components, including completion of the voter-identification process and demining, have yet to be completed.

Constraints

Delays in implementation of the UN Settlement Plan for Western Sahara throughout 1999 caused uncertainties regarding full preparation for voluntary repatriation and planning for humanitarian assistance in the camps. The two parties have yet to approve implementation of UNHCR's Plan of Action for Cross-border Confidence-building Measures, including organised visits by refugees to the Territory and the exchange of

mail and telephone communications between the camps in Tindouf and the Territory.

Funding

Owing to donor fatigue caused by the stalling of the repatriation process, funding for the Western Saharan refugees has steadily declined. In 1999, UNHCR's programme only partially covered the total assistance needs in the camps, the remainder being covered by others, such as the Spanish Red Cross and Medico International (Germany), financed primarily, but not exclusively, by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). Should budget reductions continue, the quality and quantity of basic services to the Western Saharan refugee population will no longer meet their basic humanitarian needs.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

There were no significant protection problems within the refugee camps in Tindouf. The refugees' main concern, as they explained to UNHCR during the pre-registration exercise, was their safety and well-being upon return to the Territory. Reconnaissance missions were conducted jointly with the local authorities and discussions were held on the issues arising out of the application of UNHCR's protection principles and mandate.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: Four training courses were conducted in the camps in fully equipped workshops: mechanics and welding, carpentry, weaving, and sewing. By providing new skills, the workshops helped refugees of both sexes find a source of additional income.

Crop Production: In an effort to encourage vegetable farming and give the refugees a broader diet, UNHCR's implementing partner purchased seeds and agricultural tools and distributed them to the refugees.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: A total of 5,500 adult and 3,400 baby blankets, as well as 650 bottles of gas were provided. Cotton canvas, etc., was purchased for new tents to replace those irreparably damaged by the harsh climatic conditions. In addition, 20,000 children's track suits and 35,000 pairs of shoes were distributed.

Education: Through its implementing partners, UNHCR provided school furniture and supplies for 35,000 children, distributed in 500 classes in 25 schools in the camps. Materials were also purchased for vocational training activities benefiting some 740 adolescent refugees enrolled in four centres: two for girls and two for boys. Assistance was provided to build a day-care centre for children aged 6-12. The centre's individual and group classes work on creative and artistic skills as well as health and hygiene awareness. Teachers and trainers were mainly drawn from the Western Saharan refugee community, many of whom had gained professional qualifications before going into exile.

Food: WFP provided food for 80,000 of the most vulnerable refugees. UNHCR provided tea and yeast. The Office's implementing partners purchased and distributed edible oil and milk for babies.

Health/Nutrition: The refugees in the camps received medicines, vaccines, laboratory and dental supplies, and hospital mattresses, though not in sufficient quantity to meet all their needs (the balance being made up by NGOs). Following a survey of the refugees' health and nutritional status, the first phase of a project was implemented for mothers (or expectant mothers) and infants. Training on health and nutrition was provided in order to build up the numbers of refugees in the camps able to deliver a basic level of first aid, as well as medical care and advice.

Income Generation: Cotton and woollen yarn, and other materials and accessories were provided for a weaving workshop to allow refugee women to weave and sell hand-made carpets.

Legal Assistance: UNHCR funded all costs associated with the pre-registration of the refugees, including the registration forms, specialist staff, travel and other expenses. A total of 107,000 refugees were registered in Algeria and about 26,000 in Mauritania.

Livestock: To complement the diet of the refugees, 100 camels were purchased locally and distributed to provide an additional source of meat and milk in the camps.

Operational Support (to Agencies): UNHCR funded basic administrative costs for implementing partners providing services in the camps, as well as logistics related to the purchase, receipt and distribution of assistance to the refugees. These costs included office rental and

running expenses, equipment and telecommunications. Salaries and related expenses for a project co-ordinator, secretary/accountant and a guard were covered as well. In addition, costs relating to the nutritional project were covered, including the salaries of an expatriate, a nutritionist and trainers, as well as incentives to 43 refugees involved in its implementation.

Sanitation: To maintain a safe environment and facilitate pest control, 15 metric tons of insecticide and 15,000 bottles of bleach were given to the refugees in the camps.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: Technical missions were undertaken to different parts of the Territory. In Laayoune, an assessment was made of existing infrastructure which could be put to use for repatriating refugees: housing, and possible sites for reception camps and community facilities. Additional studies will be carried out in Dakhla, Boujdour and Smara in 2000.

Transport/Logistics: Planning was undertaken for all logistics and infrastructure required for the repatriation from Tindouf and in the Territory. Spare parts, tools and accessories were provided to the mechanical workshops in the camps, to enable them to service the fleet of trucks used to distribute food and non-food items.

Water: As the refugee camps are located in a harsh desert area, contamination of the water table is the most serious environmental concern. Most of the water for human consumption in the camps is currently drawn from underground water sources and delivered by tanker trucks. Because this is expensive and deliveries are unreliable, feasibility studies were undertaken to look into permanent water-supply systems. By the end of 1999, a commercial contract was signed with a local company, which drilled a new borehole in the Dakhla camp.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

In Algeria, UNHCR maintained offices in Algiers and Tindouf, manned by ten international and 12 national staff. In the Territory, UNHCR had an office in Laayoune, run by two international and two national staff. The Moroccan authorities also agreed to consider UNHCR's presence and freedom of movement in other locations in the Territory such as Smara, Dakhla and Boujdour. Because the implementation of the UN

Settlement Plan was delayed, the opening of these offices was put on hold. In Mauritania, the two offices in Zouerate and Nouadhibou were closed in early 1999, following the completion of the pre-registration exercise. The office in Nouakchott remained open, run by three national staff.

Working with Others

Under the UN Settlement Plan, UNHCR has overall responsibility for the repatriation programme, which should be implemented in close co-ordination with other UN agencies and other partners, particularly MINURSO, WFP and, eventually, the World Bank and UNDP. Pending implementation of the Plan, WFP continued to give food rations to vulnerable refugees. Some activities, such as the actual transport of the refugees or provision of relief supplies, will be made through commercial contracts and/or agreements with local and international NGOs. UNHCR maintained communication at all times with all relevant parties in the region: Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, MINURSO, the POLISARIO Front and refugee leaders. In the camps, UNHCR worked with two international and one national NGO. The national NGO was, as the main partner, responsible for shelter, health, education, sanitary services and income-generating projects. UNHCR also co-ordinated activities with several international NGOs which provided services and distributed food in the refugee camps, using funding from other sources. The success of the programme depended to a considerable extent on increased participation by refugees in camp activities and self-administration.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Implementation of the UN Settlement Plan is still blocked by obstacles that can only be effectively removed by the United Nations acting in concert with the Western Saharan refugees and the Government of Morocco. For the Plan to become politically viable, additional efforts must be made to narrow the gap between the parties and reach agreement on a just and durable solution. Although UNHCR's assistance did not cover the needs of all refugees in the camps, other agencies (NGOs) complemented its programme and bridged some of the gaps. However, since the repatriation operation is likely to be further delayed, there is now the risk that faltering donor interest in this protracted refugee situation could handicap the humanitarian agencies' efforts to help Western Saharan refugees.

Offices

ALGERIA

Algiers
Tindouf

WESTERN SAHARA TERRITORY

Laayoune

MAURITANIA

Nouakchott
Nouadhibou (closed in early 1999)
Zouerate (closed in early 1999)

Partners

ALGERIA

NGOs

Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)
Croissant Rouge Algérien
Enfants Réfugiés du Monde (ERM)



Voluntary Contributions (USD)

Donor	Income	Contribution
Japan	200,000	200,000
United States of America	1,221,897	1,221,897
TOTAL	1,421,897	1,421,897

Financial Report (USD)

Programme Overview	Current Year's Projects		Prior Years' Projects	
		notes		notes
Opening Balance	3,156,230	(1)		
Income from Contributions	1,421,897	(1)		
Other Funds Available	1,045,755			
Total Funds Available	5,623,882	(5)		
Expenditure	3,217,004	(1) (5)		
Closing Balance	2,406,878	(1) (5)		
Expenditure Breakdown*				
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination**	2,115,876		161,401	
Legal Assistance	0		1,938	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	0		4,331	
Water	0		45,369	
Sub - total Operational	2,115,876		213,039	
Administrative Support**	486,301		0	
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	2,602,177	(5)	213,039	(6)
Unliquidated Obligations	614,827	(5)	0	(6)
TOTAL	3,217,004	(1) (5)	213,039	
Instalments with Implementing Partners				
Payments Made	0		0	
Reporting Received	0		0	
Balance	0		0	
Outstanding 1 January	0		0	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		0	
Currency Adjustment	0		0	
Outstanding 31 December	0		0	
Unliquidated Obligations				
Outstanding 1 January	0		386,939	(6)
New Obligations	3,217,004	(1) (5)	0	
Disbursements	2,602,177	(5)	213,039	(6)
Cancellations	0		173,900	(6)
Outstanding 31 December	614,827	(5)	0	(6)

* For expenditure in Algeria, please refer to the Regional Overview for North Africa.

** Includes costs at Headquarters.

Figures which cross reference to accounts

(1) Annex 1 to Statement 1

(5) Schedule 5

(6) Schedule 6